THE CONTRIBUTION OF HANS-GEORG GADAMER TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

by

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

Though he would perhaps disagree with the conclusions of this thesis, I should like to acknowledge the kindly interest of Dr. Gibson Winter, Professor of Christianity and Society at Princeton Theological Seminary, in whose seminars I first came to grips with Truth and Method. I should also like to register my debt to my wife Carol who initially typed my sometimes hardly decipherable manuscript.

A Note about Translations

All translations of texts by Gadamer quoted in this thesis are by the present writer. Where possible, a published English translation has been consulted, and a reference to this translation been given in a footnote.

Minor alterations were made by Library staff on the instructions of the author, after the thesis had been accepted. These were mainly the correcting of spelling errors and occur on the following pages:
9, 13, 19, 27, 60, 61, 88, 95, 113, 129, 135, 145, 150, 176, 180, 203, 211, 217, 221, 222, 238, 245, 246, 260, 262, 264, 270, 274, 286.

A B S T R A C T

The aim of the thesis is in Part One to give a critical exposition of the foundations of Gadamer's philosophy, and in Part Two to show how that philosophy can contribute to a Christian philosophy. Part One outlines Gadamer's interpretation of Heidegger's analysis of the "fore-structure" of Understanding and the former's development of that analysis with his own analysis of "effective-historical consciousness" and his positive understanding of prejudice. Gadamer understands Understanding as a mode of experience and resists any attempt by reflection to elevate experience into knowledge; he wants Hegel's "science of the experience of consciousness" without his Absolute Knowledge. He also wants knowledge and truth without the totality which would guarantee them, and believes that Heidegger's "ontologically positive" understanding of finitude allows this. We try to show the difficulties of such a position, and also of his attempt to guarantee truth with the "speculative structure" of language. Finally we question the grounding of his philosophy in the aesthetic experience testified to by the "other side" of the Platonic doctrine of Beauty. In Part Two we suggest that religious experience provides a more adequate grounding for a philosophy such as Gadamer's. We try to clarify the relation between Gadamer and theology, and suggest that this relation is more intimate than he admits. We then try to see whether the Christian understandings of Eschatology and of Providence can shed new light on the questions raised in Part One, and can hint at their resolution. Finally we sketch a Christian philosophy which attempts to overcome the weaknesses and ambiguities of Gadamer's philosophy by a more explicit and thoroughgoing appropriation of the Christian-Platonic tradition.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A B B R E V I A T I O N S

EB = Existence and Being (Heidegger)

HD = Hegels Dialektik (Gadamer)

HD(ET) = Hegel's Dialectic (Gadamer)

HW (plus vol. no.) = Hegels Werke, Vollständige Ausgabe: Berlin, 1841

KS = Kleine Schriften, vols.I - IV (Gadamer)

PH = Philosophical Hermeneutics (Gadamer)

PS = Phenomenology of Spirit (Hegel, trans. A.V. Miller)

TM = Truth and Method (Gadamer)

WM = Wahrheit und Methode (Gadamer)

W Met = Was ist Metaphysik? 11.Auflage (Heidegger)

INTRODUCTION

This introduction has two aims: first of all, to suggest why it should be worth the while of a theological student to study in some depth the philosophy of Gadamer; and secondly, to give a brief indication of the way in which our study will proceed.

Gadamer, it might be supposed, is a relatively obscure German "hermeneutician" whose philosophy, depending on your theological stance, either has been assimilated by the so-called "New Hermeneutic" theologians and their followers, or has been soundly refuted by Pannenberg, or is a prime example of the tendency of bourgeois Western European intellectuals to interpret the world rather than to change it, or is just another example of the German philosopher's chronic failure to know what he is talking about. To those who hold the last view it might be suggested that Gadamer's discussion of prejudice might help them to use their own prejudices creatively. The third view represents a more serious charge; however unless theology is to become absorbed into a Marxian philosophy that is "extremist, abstract and revolutionary",[1] it would do well to heed Gadamer's stress on tradition as the source of "the quiet power of the possible".[2] Of course the world-order has to be criticized with reference to a criterion that transcends it; but that transcendent criterion comes to us (at least in the Christian view) only in history and tradition, and these have to be interpreted. The first two views come from

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[1] cf. WM 264f; TM 249

[2] cf. Heidegger's Über den Humanismus, p.7f.

diametrically opposed theological positions, but they have in common the assumption that Gadamer is now of at best marginal relevance; what he has to say has either been said by Ebeling and Fuchs and their followers, or else it is simply wrong, as Pannenberg has shown.[3] But rather than Gadamer's philosophy being something they can agree to neglect, it can in the present writer's view be a middle ground where these opposing theological positions can come together to disagree creatively. This applies primarily to the first two positions, for Gadamer's attempt to mediate Hegel and Heidegger can provide, even if it turns out to be unsuccessful, at least the starting point for such a mediation and hence for the mediation of the modern theologies influenced by Hegel (e.g. Pannenberg and Moltmann) and those influenced by Heidegger (e.g. Fuchs and Macquarrie). But Gadamer's philosophy can also provide the common ground for a constructive dialogue between all the position represented above, since not only does his dialogue with Habermas (as well as with Hegel) open up his philosophy in the direction of Marxian thought, but his references to Wittgenstein open doors in that direction also. This is not to suggest that Gadamer offers anything like a synthesis of all these position, but merely that he has a gift for bringing opposed and apparently isolated positions into play, for making the fixed determinations of thought fluid, as Hegel might say (this is no doubt connected with his inclination in politics towards "a balance of powers"). If doing philosophy and theology consists in standing in the crossfire of the philosophical and theological giants, then

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[3] cf. Pannenberg's article "Hermeneutics and Universal History" (for details see Part One, Chapter 1(e) note 1).

the present writer knows of no modern thinker who has done so as conscientiously, as explicity and as consistently as Gadamer. There is much to be learned simply by standing beside him.

As will by now be clear, Gadamer is in the present writer's view much more than "merely a hermeneutician". Gadamer's concern is not merely to tell us how to interpret texts in general and philosophical texts in particular, but is rather (if we may adapt the subtitle of the Introduction to Heidegger's What is Metaphysics?) to take "the way back into the ground of hermeneutics", that is, to root the understanding operative in the human sciences in that primordial Understanding which, as an existential of There-being, first allows "World" to be at all. But Gadamer's project is more ambitious than Heidegger's, for he is not content merely to till the ground of hermeneutics; he wants also to tend and train the tree of knowledge which grows from that ground, that is, he wants to carry over what he takes to be the results of Heidegger's ontological investigations into the logic of the human sciences. The extent to which this project is successful will be the main theme of Part One of our study. Whether successful or not, Gadamer's project is vast in scope; his hermeneutics is, as he puts it, "universal-ontological", so that it is no longer appropriate to call him "merely a hermeneutician" but rather "not less than a hermeneutician". His "outline of a philosophical hermeneutics /Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik/" (as Truth and Method is subtitled, though the English translation omits this) takes up the most fundamental philosophical questions of all and is a substantial contribution to general philosophy.

The breadth of Gadamer's erudition as well as the fundamental nature of his enquiry mean that it is far beyond the scope and competence of the present writer to give a complete account of Truth and Method, let alone Gadamer's other writings. In fact this study really only deals with the second half of Truth and Method (i.e. Part Three and the second half of Part Two) and that only partially. It has virtually ignored the contribution of Gadamer as a historian of aesthetics and hermeneutics, and concentrates on what the present writer takes to be the core of his philosophy. Part One of the present study is devoted to the exposition and critical analysis of that core. Part Two of our study attempts to treat more extensively the results of our intensive survey in Part One. It attempts to view Gadamer's basic philosophical project in the perspective of some wider philosophical and theological issues, and to see what contribution Gadamer can make to the discussion of these issues. What these issues are will be evident from the chapter titles in Part Two. The final chapter will first of all give a brief recapitulation of the main themes of the preceding chapters, and will then try to weave these themes together into a consistent philosophical and theological position. This position, for which we will venture to claim the name "Christian Platonism", will be presented only in the barest outline; it is intended as a programmatic sketch rather than as the condensation of an elaborated philosophical and theological system.

No doubt most of the faults which this study contains derive ultimately from the same, or from similar, fundamental assumptions. It is perhaps as well to bring forward now two of these assumptions

which bind the study together (for better or for worse). Of course, as Gadamer says, the writer cannot be fully aware of his own presuppositions or prejudices until the reader points them out to him. Of the assumptions which the present writer is aware of, however, the most important is this: he assumes that there is a sharp distinction between ontology in Heidegger's and perhaps the Thomist sense, and logic. The nature of the relation between ontology and logic is precisely what is at stake for him in the following pages. That they may be related by some sort of dialectic is not denied, only that such a dialectic may merely be assumed. Perhaps the present writer ought not to have embarked upon this study until he was more familiar with Thomas Aquinas than he is. However at least it might be for him a sort of preparation for the gospel of Thomas!

The other major assumption that is made in this study is that philosophy is always the philosophy of experience, and that the philosophy of religious experience is the highest form of philosophy (though not for that reason the highest form of reality, as Hegel seems to have thought). The role and status of theology (if it is different from the philosophy of religious experience) is very ambiguous and uncertain for the present writer. In this he is probably even more of a Liberal Protestant than he is aware. Of one thing he is certain, however, and that is that he is not prepared to take the "dogmatic" way (whether Protestant or Roman Catholic) out of this impasse. He agrees with Gadamer that the true destiny of all human beings is to experience "the openness of Being", and that such experience means the end of all dogmatism.

P A R T O N E

THE FOUNDATIONS OF GADAMER'S PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER ONE

GADAMER'S CONCEPT OF UNDERSTANDING

(a) Understanding in Being and Time

Heidegger's presentation of Understanding[1] in Being and Time is fundamental to Gadamer's position. Gadamer describes in Truth and Method how in his view Heidegger's concept of Understanding resolves and at the same time goes beyond the apparently intractable set of problems into which hermeneutical reflection had run.[2] However for Gadamer Being and Time was more than a solution to a contemporary philosophical impasse; he sees it as going in a radically new direction, and thus opening up new directions for hermeneutics. Truth and Method is devoted to the exploration of these new horizons. (WM 245; TM 230) In particular, Heidegger's analysis of Understanding forms the basis of Gadamer's "theory of hermeneutical experience" which he unfolds in Part Two Section II of Truth and Method. Hence this section begins with a sub-section entitled "The elevation of the historicality of Understanding to the status of hermeneutical principle". Gadamer gives an account of the problems which haunted reflection on the nature of hermeneutics (that is, reflection on the Understanding operative in the human sciences /Geisteswissenschaften/

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1 "Understanding" (capitalized) always refers to the philosophical concept of Understanding /Verstehen/, especially as used by Heidegger. It should not be confused with Understanding /Verstand/ as opposed to Reason /Vernunft/ as in Kant and Hegel; "understanding" (without a capital) refers to a particular understanding /Verständnis/ arrived at as a result of the process of Understanding.

2 See WM 240-250; TM 225-234.

and especially the historical sciences) in that part of Truth and Method which is devoted to Dilthey's struggle to vindicate such Understanding against the claims of the methods of the natural sciences.[3] In Gadamer's view Dilthey's project failed because he remained too much under the spell of the methods of the natural sciences, and tried to secure the status of the human sciences alongside of, and in contrast to, the methods of the natural sciences, thus creating a radical split between them. The beginnings of a solution to these problems are to be found, Gadamer believes, in Husserl's phenomenological researches.[4] Husserl too had reckoned that the application of the natural sciences' concept of "objectivity" within the sphere of the human sciences was "nonsense". (WM 247; TM 231) The distinction of Husserl's approach was to go back behind the natural sciences to the so-called "life-world"[5] in order to ground the rigorously scientific philosophy which was his goal. In Gadamer's view Husserl's move was in the right direction, and Heidegger's work was in one sense a continuation of Husserl's approach inasmuch as he too goes back to the "life-world" prior to the subject-object relation of the natural sciences. Although Heidegger has very different aims from Husserl - which led to a radical breach with Husserl's approach and aims - there is a sense in which there is a continuity between Husserl and Heidegger and through to Gadamer. Heidegger's existential analytic in general

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[3] See WM 205-228; TM 192-214.

[4] See WM 229-240; TM 214-225.

[5] For Husserl's "life-world", see Gadamer's essay "The Science of the Life-World" (KS III 190-201; PH 182-197).

and his analysis of Understanding in particular are transcendental in nature; that is, Understanding is analysed as the structure of all possible experience. In this sense there is a direct line of descent from Kant through Husserl to Heidegger (and Gadamer). (WM 249; TM 234) Where the break with the Kantian tradition comes is the fact that the examination of the structure of all possible experience is focussed not in terms of the natural sciences, but in terms of the "life-world", that is, in terms of experience prior to the supervention of the natural sciences and the subject-object relation operative in them. (WM 330; TM 311f)

This much Husserl and Heidegger have in common. The difference is that whereas Husserl was concerned with founding philosophy as a rigorous science and hence focussed on problems of "constitution" or the grounding of the structures of meaning in a transcendental subjectivity - an interest which lead him in the direction of some form of transcendental idealism - Heidegger claims that his concern in Being and Time is quite different. The aim of Being and Time is to raise anew the question of Being as such which the Greeks asked.[6] Heidegger's method of approaching this question is by giving an analysis of There-being /Dasein/,[7] Heidegger's name for man as the being that understands Being. At this point comes the real clash with

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[6] See BT 21ff. /Since the English translation includes the pagination of the original, we omit references to Sein und Zeit./

[7] We follow the translators of Wahrheit und Methode (as well as W.J. Richardson in his Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought) in rendering Heidegger's technical term "Dasein" as "There-being". In their translation of Sein und Zeit Macquarrie and Robinson prefer to leave "Dasein" untranslated. cf. BT 27 note 1.

Husserl, for Heidegger wants to insist on the radical finitude of There-being, in terms of which alone Being is. This finitude is expressed by the term "facticity", hence Heidegger's interpretation of There-being is termed a "hermeneutics of facticity".[8] This is in conscious opposition to the so-called "idealism" of Husserl's concern with transcendental subjectivity. (WM 249f; TM 234)

In fact the distinction between Being and Time and Husserl's approach is not as clear-cut as all that. Gadamer notes "the ambiguity that made Heidegger's Being and Time appear sometimes like transcendental phenomenology and sometimes like its critique." (WM 241 note 1; TM 522 note 154) This ambiguity arises because, among other factors, Husserl maintained the absolute historicity of transcendental subjectivity and hence could claim "that the meaning of facticity is itself an eidos, that it belongs essentially to the eidetic sphere of universal essences." (WM 241; TM 226) The ambiguity of Being and Time in this regard is one of the factors which contributes to the problem of the so-called "turn" in Heidegger's work, that is, the problem of the relation of Being and Time to the later work. Gadamer's position on this problem is that, while acknowledging the ambiguity of Being and Time and allowing that it could be read as an exercise in transcendental phenomenology, he maintains that the "turn" is already presupposed in Being and Time, but that Heidegger was unable to make the turn from 'Being and time" to "time and Being"[9] because of the terms in which Being and Time is couched,

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[8] On Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity", see Gadamer's essay "Sein Geist Gott" (KS IV 74-85), p.78. cf. Otto Pöggeler's essay "Being as Appropriation /Sein als Ereignis/" in Heidegger and Modern Philosophy, ed. M. Murray (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p.87.

[9] See BT 64; also Über den Humanismus, p.17.

that is, those of transcendental phenomenology.[10] As Heidegger himself would later say, the language of Being and Time is too "metaphysical".[11] For Heidegger "metaphysical" means much the same as "subjective", and it is this "subjectivism" which Gadamer claims is implicitly and in principle overcome already in Being and Time. Heidegger's contention that the meaning of Being is to be determined from within the horizon of time meant more than that "the structure of temporality appeared as the ontological determination of subjectivity" (WM 243; TM 227f); it meant that Being itself is time. (ibid.) And this thesis, Gadamer says, "burst asunder the whole subjectivism of modern philosophy." (ibid.) Heidegger had seen the subjectivism (or "metaphysics") at the heart of transcendental philosophy, including transcendental phenomenology. But since Being and Time is couched to a certain extent in terms of transcendental phenomenology, this insight, and the critique of traditional modes of thinking which it involves, are obscured. Heidegger gives up the attempt to carry through the project of Being and Time and looks for other ways of carrying throught the "turn". Hence the "turn" which becomes explicit in the later writings is no new venture but the carrying through of the "turn" which was already apparent implicitly but in principle in Being and Time.[12]

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[10] cf. Gadamer's essay "The Phenomenological Movement" (KS III 150-189; PH 130-181), esp. KS III 165; PH 149.

[11] See Über den Humanismus, p.17.

[12] cf. KS I 74; PH 50.

The importance for our present concern of Gadamer's position on Heidegger's "turn" is that it allows him, he believes, to combine elements from Heidegger's later writings, for example, the emphasis on the work of art and on language, and the whole critique of subjectivism, with the analysis of Understanding in Being and Time. For those who hold that the "turn" involves a definite discontinuity and even an about-face on the part of Heidegger, such a combination would seem problematic. Discussion of how Gadamer can resolve the difficulties that might be supposed to be raised by combining elements from the earlier and later Heidegger cannot be attempted here. However it is arguable that the question as to the unity of Gadamer's position, drawing as it does on all stages of Heidegger's work as well as on other sources, is in principle different from, though perhaps in the last resort not entirely independent of, the question of the unity of Heidegger's work.

Gadamer makes it clear that his intentions are different from those of Heidegger in Being and Time. (WM 248, 250; TM 232f, 235) What leads Heidegger is the question of Being, and the analysis of Understanding and the excursus into historical hermeneutics and criticism[13] are steps towards answering that question. Gadamer on the other hand is concerned with hermeneutics, and is interested in the implications of the analysis of Understanding for the self-understanding of the human sciences. Problems of ontology enter his purview to the extent that particular understandings of Being hinder or facilitate the appropriation of the work of art and the historical

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[13] BT 424-455.

text. It is with these rather different aims that Gadamer approaches Heidegger's analysis of Understanding.

For Heidegger, then, Understanding is:

> the original form of the realization of There-being, which is Being-in-the world. Before any differentiation of Understanding into the different directions of pragmatic and theoretical interest, Understanding is There-being's mode of Being, in that it is potentiality-for-Being and "possibility".[14]

Understanding is an "existential", that is, one of the basic structures of human existence. This original and basic Understanding, which precedes and makes possible all subsequent and, as Heidegger would insist, derivative kinds of Understanding, is concerned with There-being's own possibilities. Heidegger calls this directedness of Understanding towards There-being's own possibilities the "projective" character of There-being. It is only through this projective activity of There-being that there is "World" at all; "there is" anything at all only to the extent that There-being "discovers" or opens up meaning through its projective activity. However this opening up of "World" through the projective activity of There-being only takes place as There-being projects its <u>own</u> possibilities. Thus Understanding is essentially concerned with itself. All Understanding is self-understanding. (WM 246; TM 231) Or as Gadamer puts it: "Thus it is true in all cases that a person who understands understands himself and projects himself according to his own possibilities." (ibid.)

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[14] WM 245; TM 230.

How this understanding of Understanding relates to other philosophical traditions, for example to the various forms of empiricism in the English-speaking world, is not Gadamer's primary concern.[15] He evidently sees Being and Time as a genuine philosophical breakthrough and is mainly concerned to defend the existential analysis of There-being against being misunderstood as another stage in the development of the transcendental phenomenology of consciousness, or as some form of moralistic "existentialism" in the manner of Sartre. He himself goes on to develop the notion of Understanding in the light of Heidegger's "turn" and is, as we saw, convinced that this development is not only not problematic, but is a natural unfolding of the implications of the analysis of Understanding in Being and Time. Whether it is so easy to move from an Understanding which, as the projection of There-being's own possibilities, is in a radical sense self-understanding to an Understanding which involves a"loss of self"[16] is a question we cannot go into here. What is of more immediate relevance to the development of Gadamer's argument in Truth and Method is the positive significance which the notions of "circularity" and "pre-understanding" acquire in Heidegger's analysis of Understanding.

This positive significance is rooted in the structure of There-being as "thrown project" /geworfener Entwurf/. The projective

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[15] Though Gadamer is keen to effect a rapprochement between Continental European "phenomenological hermeneutics" and Anglo-Saxon empiricism on the basis of a common interest in language. cf. KS I 146-147; PH 125-127; also KS III 185-189; PH 173-177; also the introduction to PH, xxxiii-xxxix.

[16] See KS I 75; PH 51.

activity of Understanding always operates on the basis of a preceding understanding of what is to be understood. It is not the case, according to Heidegger, that There-being in fact (ontically) happens in every instance to enter into the process of Understanding with some sort of prior understanding. Finitude is not a regrettable contingency that inevitably hampers the smooth operation of Understanding; on the contrary, finitude is what makes Understanding possible at all. Finitude determines the ontological structure of There-being. "Thrownness" /Geworfenheit/ does not mean that consciousness happens as a matter of fact to find itself here rather than there, now rather than then. It belongs to the very nature of There-being to be there; it is being there that constitutes human consciousness (or being).[17] This is one of the meanings that are contained in Heidegger's famous phrase: "The essence of There-being lies in its existence."[18] This emphasis on "facticity" constitutes the real cleavage between Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and Heidegger's approach, though as we saw above, Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity" is not without its ambiguities.

Be that as it may, what interests Gadamer most of all about the "thrownness" or facticity of Understanding is that it throws light on his own problem of how the historical sciences should understand their own relation to their "objects". Not only does Being and Time undermine the claim of the subject-object schema of the natural sciences to paradigmatic significance, and hence call

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[17] We are using the term "consciousness" in this sentence in a loose way, since Heidegger's use of the term "Dasein" for human beings implies a critique of the Idealist stress on the role of consciousness.

[18] BT 67.

in question the idea that the "objects" of the historian are somehow "out there", over against the "objective" neutrality of the historian; it also suggests the way in which the historian is related to his "objects". This relation Gadamer characterizes as "belongingness" or perhaps "participation" /Zugehörigkeit/.[19] (WM 247; TM 232) Gadamer takes the "thrownness" of There-being to imply that it belongs to the very structure of There-being to be related to the past, to tradition. (ibid.) Relating itself to the past is not something There-being happens to do as one activity among others, for instance if it resolves to be a professor of history. There-being always already is related to the past; what the historian does is to make that relation explicit. (WM 234; TM 251)[20] No doubt that process of making explicit may call for different techniques, including some from the domain of the natural sciences. Gadamer studiously avoids making any pronouncement on the relative merits of the techniques the historian may use. What he is concerned to insist upon is that none of these techniques should be used to define the basic relation of the historian to his subject-matter. Above all he is concerned to refute the notion that because the relation of the historian to his subject-matter does not easily accommodate itself to the demands of the methods of the natural sciences, it is therefore incapable of yielding knowledge or truth.

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[19] For a discussion of Gadamer's use of the term "participation" see Chapter 8(b) below.

[20] cf. Gadamer's essay "Was ist Wahrheit?" (KS I 46-58), p.57.

Gadamer's aim is to overcome the distorting effects of the application of an inappropriate yardstick to the historical sciences. But his intention is not only this negative one of freeing the historical sciences from the methodological imperialism of the natural sciences; it is also the positive one of emphasizing the positive significance of "thrownness".[21] "Thrownness" indicates for Gadamer that relation to tradition in which There-being finds itself and on the basis of which it is able to project new possibilities of Being:

> The general structure of Understanding acquires its concrete form in historical Understanding, in that the ties of custom and tradition and the corresponding potentialities of one's future become effective in Understanding itself. There-being that projects itself in relation to its own potentiality-for-Being has always "been". This is the meaning of the existential of "thrownness".[22]

Before proceeding to examine Gadamer's presentation of the fore-structure and circularity of Understanding, it has to be noted that Gadamer's positive estimate of "thrownness" is very much in accordance with his own understanding and use of Heidegger. Of course "thrownness" as an existential or structural component of There-being is supposed to be neutral and prior to any evaluation. Nevertheless the role it plays and the emphasis it receives in any particular system of thought will inevitably affect the significance which is attached to it. In Being and Time "thrownness" indicates that it belongs to the essence of There-being to be delivered over or abandoned to a particular situation at a particular time. This

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[21] cf. KS I 73; PH 49 where Gadamer writes that "thrownness not only specifies the limits of sovereign self-possession, but also opens up and determines the positive possibilities that we are".

[22] WM 249; TM 234.

"thrownness" is disclosed to There-being in "mood" which always accompanies There-being's Understanding. Understanding and mood always go together.[23] For the most part There-being attempts to evade the "thrownness" that is disclosed to it in mood.[24] "Thrownness", "delivered over", "abandonment" may be structural terms, but the role they fulfil and the ring they have suggest that what they refer to is essentially burdensome to human existence. A grimly Augustinian strain can be detected in Being and Time in which existence is seen as the arduous task of discovering and remaining true to oneself in a bleak and daunting situation.[25] Without a commitment to a particular interpretation of Heidegger, it is perhaps possible to characterize his development in a rough and ready way as a move from presenting existence as a human task to seeing existence as "grace", as sheer gift from a trans-human realm. This move is called the "turn". As has been noted elsewhere, Gadamer understands Being and Time in light of the "turn". This can be clearly seen in his treatment of "thrownness" which he positively characterizes in terms of "belongingness" to or "participation" in tradition, a presentation which contrasts with Heidegger's association of "thrownness" with "abandonment".

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[23] BT 182

[24] BT 175

[25] cf. Heidegger's quotation from Augustine's Confessions X, 16 (BT 69). cf. also W.J. Richardson's discussion of "thrownness" in Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), p.233, where he talks of There-being's "indigence".

It is not the business of this study to attempt a "correct" interpretation of Being and Time. Indeed from Gadamer's point of view such an undertaking would be radically misconcieved, since the ideal of one "correct" interpretation true for all time is in his view a pernicious illusion generated by the misapplication of scientific method. For Gadamer, presumably not even the interpretation of Being and Time by Heidegger himself in the late 1920's would have paradigmatic significance. The mens auctoris no longer has absolute precedence. What this means for the status of Truth and Method itself and for Gadamer's protests against misunderstandings of his own work is a question which we cannot go into here. Without a commitment at this stage to a particular view of this complex of problems, it seems possible to allow that how a work or a concept is interpreted (not excluding the interpretation of the author) will depend on ~~his~~ the historical situation and ~~his~~ aims of the interpreter. In this case, how the term "thrownness" is interpreted will depend upon the historical situation and aims of the interpreter; that is, how the term "thrown project" is understood will depend precisely on the situation of the interpreter as "thrown project".

We are on perhaps less controversial ground when we come to Gadamer's appropriation of Heidegger's analysis of Understanding and interpretation in terms of fore-structure and circularity.[26] Gadamer follows Heidegger closely at this point. According to Heidegger, the fact that all Understanding and interpretation are

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[26] See BT sec. 32

rooted in the existential of Understanding, which is a basic structural component of There-being as "thrown project", means that all Understanding and interpretation are characterized by what Heidegger calls "the fore-structure of Understanding". There is no presuppositionless apprehending of "what is there".[27] All Understanding is grounded in fore-having /Vorhabe/, fore-sight /Vorsicht/, and fore-conception /Vorgriff/. (ibid.) This means that Understanding is always in a sense circular, since, as Heidegger says, "Any interpretation which is to contribute understanding must already have understood what is to be interpreted".[28] Heidegger's argument at this point is of key importance for Gadamer's overall aim, that is, the vindication of historical enquiry as a source of knowledge and truth; for Heidegger contends that, despite the insistence of logic that circularity in historical interpretation necessarily represents a vicious circle and excludes historical interpretation from the domain of rigorous knowledge,[29] nevertheless "the ontological presuppositions of historical knowledge transcend in principle the idea of rigour held in the most exact sciences".[30] In other words, the circularity involved in historical interpretation is not a lamentable defect in comparison with the methodological purity and rigour of the "exact" sciences, for this circularity is of the same sort as that which characterizes

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[27] BT 191f

[28] BT 194

[29] ibid.

[30] BT 195

the fundamental structure of There-being. Hence the knowing of the historical sciences is not merely another sort of knowing than that of the "exact sciences". Because of its circular structure it comes closer to the primordial knowing which constitutes There-being itself. As Heidegger says, "In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing".[31]

The recognition of the circular nature of interpretation thus does not mean that all historical knowledge is therefore "subjective", "arbitrary", and "relative". Heidegger insists that it is "our first, last and constant task never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves."[32] This sentence takes on programmatic significance for Gadamer. Knowledge, scientific[33] knowledge, occurs when the interpreter risks his pre-understanding in the encounter with "the things themselves" /die Sachen selbst/,[34] that is, with the subject-matter /Sachverhalt/

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31 ibid.

32 ibid.

33 "Scientific" /wissenschaftlich/ in the broad sense of the term, rather than in the sense of "having to do with the natural sciences" /naturwissenschaftlich/.

34 It is important to distinguish the phenomenological "thing itself" /die Sache selbst/ from the Kantian "thing-in-itself" /das Ding-an-sich/. cf. WM 421-432; TM 403-414; also the essay "The Nature of Things and the Language of Things /Die Natur der Sache und die Sprache der Dinge/" (KS I 59-69; PH 69-81), esp. KS I 62f; PH 72f.

of the text. The initial understanding or projection of meaning is revised in light of this encounter. Interpretation is a process, a constant movement to-and-fro between the subject-matter of the text and the interpreter's continually revised projections of meaning. It is this "working out" of meaning in the interplay between text and interpreter that offers in Gadamer's view the possibility of scientific knowledge and "objectivity" in a rather different sense from that of the natural sciences:

> The working out of appropriate projects, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed by "the things themselves", is the constant task of Understanding. The only "objectivity" here is confirmation of a fore-meaning in its being worked out. What characterizes the arbitrariness of inappropriate fore-meanings if not the fact that they come to nothing in the working out?[35]

The "objectivity" of the circular process of interpretation depends on both the pre-understanding of the interpreter and what the text says in all its otherness coming into play. The interpreter must put his own pre-understanding at risk. This goes against the methodological demands of the exact sciences in two ways. First, the interpreter's own pre-understanding is not to be rigorously excluded in the interest of "neutrality" or "objectivity", but is to be brought consciously and explicitly into play. Secondly, the interpreter must in principle be open to accept as true that which may not conform to his own criteria for truth, i.e. the interpreter may not limit at the outset what may or may not be true by stipulating that all truth-claims are subject to his rules of certainty. (WM 344; TM 325)

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[35] WM 252; TM 236f.

In both cases Gadamer is attacking any attempt in historical interpretation to guarantee truth in advance by methodological rigour - or alternatively any renunciation of truth in the absence of such methodological guarantees. The guarantee of truth resides not in some method established in advance of the Understanding process, but in the process itself in which pre-understandings are worked out in interplay with the subject-matter of the text.

The nature of this interplay must be explored later. For the moment we will summarize Gadamer's indebtedness to Being and Time. Heidegger's presentation of Understanding as an existential or basic structural principle of There-being is fundamental to Gadamer's theory of hermeneutical experience. Heidegger's presentation of Understanding with its fore-structure and circularity means that not only is historical interpretation different from, and independent of, the methods of the exact sciences; it also offers the possibility of "a more primordial kind of knowing". Thus in Gadamer's view the attempt to vindicate the knowledge and truth of the human sciences finds a firm basis in Being and Time. However Gadamer wants to develop what he believes to be the implications of Heidegger's analysis of Understanding. The historicality or "thrownness" of There-being, the principle that its Understanding is always "thrown", implies in Gadamer's view that There-being always stands in a relation of "belongingness" to, or participation in, tradition. The positive estimate of pre-understanding as the condition of all Understanding leads, in Gadamer's view, to a re-appraisal of the notion of "prejudice", and it is with this that the next section will deal.

(b) Understanding and Prejudice

Heidegger's demonstration of the fundamental role which pre-understanding plays in the process of Understanding has, in Gadamer's view, an implication of the greatest importance; it implies that the notion of "prejudice" /Vorurteil/ stands in need of re-appraisal. "Prejudice" has a negative connotation. The word itself, however, means simply "an advance judgment" and only acquired its negative connotation in the Enlightenment. But the Enlightenment, Gadamer contends, had a prejudice against prejudice, and he intends to expose this prejudice and effect a rehabilitation of prejudice and the closely related concepts of authority and tradition. This critique of the Enlightenment prejudice against prejudice is the place at which Gadamer's attempt to present an authentic historical hermeneutics has its starting point. The overcoming of this prejudice against prejudice opens the way, he believes, to an appropriate understanding of the finitude to which our human existence as well as our historical consciousness is subject. (WM 260; TM 244)

The Enlightenment prejudice against prejudice is grounded in its confidence in reason as the sole legislator of truth. Prejudice, authority, tradition are set up as the counter-poles to reason, and just as these had been rigorously excluded from the understanding of the natural world, so they were to be excluded from the understanding of the truth of historical, and especially Biblical, texts. Truth or certainty was to be found in rigorous methodological self-reflection, while all else was subject to doubt. In the case of historical texts, and especially the Bible, the truths they contained were the truths of reason, and these were by their nature free from

any connection with history. Understanding a text in terms of history, that is, in terms of its historical context, was only to be resorted to when what it said was not self-evidently true. And in this case we were only concerned with the meaning of the text, not with its truth. Gadamer cites as an example of this Spinoza's method of interpreting scripture. (WM 169f; TM 159f) Though the contrast between reason on the one hand, and, on the other, prejudice, authority and tradition, might be presented in varying degrees of sharpness (WM 257; TM 242), it nevertheless remained fundamental to the Enlightenment outlook. The systematic conquest of mythos by logos may not be in fact realizable, but it nevertheless remained the ideal of the Enlightenment (ibid.).

However the prejudice against prejudice is not limited to the Enlightenment period itself. By means of a "curious refraction" caused by Romanticism (ibid.), it comes to dominate the historical school of the nineteenth century and its influence can be felt to the present day. By this "curious refraction" Gadamer means that although it was a reaction against the Enlightenment, Romanticism actually perpetuated the basic outlook of the Enlightenment in that it did not call in question the whole idea of a conquest of mythos by logos, but simply reversed the evaluation of this supposed process. Logos and mythos, reason and tradition were still contrasted, only the dominance of the former over the latter was seen as a baneful effect of the detested modern civilisation. Rather than looking for the interpenetration of logos and mythos, reason and tradition, as Gadamer wants to do, the Romantics merely exalted tradition at the expense of reason. But as Gadamer rather caustically remarks:

"Primaeval wisdom is merely the inverse of 'primaeval stupidity' /Die Urweisheit ist nur das Gegenbild der ‚Urdummheit7". (WM 258; TM 243) Mythos without logos is as much an abstraction as logos without mythos.

The Romantic exaltation of the past and of "the exotic", that is, of all that was not tainted by the modern Enlightenment, nevertheless led to a remarkable expansion of the study of these areas, and the flourishing of the historical school of the nineteenth century is largely due to the impetus of Romanticism. However, as we saw, Romanticism was in a fundamental way still rooted in the Enlightenment schema, and this shows through in the historical school of the nineteenth century. Historicism shares with the Enlightenment the view that tradition which is not "reasonable" can only be understood historically. However what in the Enlightenment was resorted to in exceptional cases only (i.e. understanding a text in terms of its historical context), becomes for historicism the general rule. (WM 260; TM 244) It is the rationally intelligible meaning of a text that becomes the exception, while the "historical" understanding extends its sway to embrace the whole of the past, ultimately including the historian's own contemporaries. (ibid.) Everything is seen in its own terms, that is, "only historically":

> Thus the romatic critique of the Enlightenment ends itself in enlightenment in that it evolves as a historical science and sucks everything into the undertow of historicism. The basic discrediting of all prejudices, which unites the experiential emphasis of the new natural sciences with the Enlightenment, becomes in the historicist Enlightenment universal and radical.[1]

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[1] WM 260; TM 244

Against this discrediting of all prejudices Gadamer wants to rehabilitate the notion of prejudice. By prejudice, he does not of course mean anything "subjective" or arbitrary, for example a personal idiosyncracy. On the contrary, what for him is important about prejudice is that it gives access to a dimension that precedes and grounds all subjective activity, the dimension of history itself. To locate meaning in history in the experience of the individual, as Dilthey does, is to turn the real process of historical Understanding on its head. History does not as it were belong to us as an accumulation of individual experiences which we as historians must re-activate; rather we belong to it. (WM 261; TM 245) We are there for history rather than vice versa. Thus the prejudices or unconscious assumptions ~~as~~ an individual makes are far more significant than his explicit and conscious self-awareness. Playing on the literal meaning of the German word "Vorurteil" as "pre-judgment", Gadamer says:

> The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why the prejudices /Vorurteile/ far more than his judgments /Urteile/ constitute the historical reality of his being.[2]

The real edge of Gadamer's attempted rehabilitation of prejudices is however the contention that prejudices are not only the carriers of the historical process, they are also the bearers of truth. This is where his sharp divergence from the Enlightenment and its successors comes, because for the latter, prejudice is by

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[2] WM 261; TM 245

definition antithetical to truth. Gadamer does not deny that the distinction made by the Enlightenment between faith in authority and the use of reason is a legitimate one. Faith in authority rather than trust in the autonomous judgment does give rise to prejudice. The point is that this does not automatically exclude the possibility that prejudice may be in fact a source of truth - a point which the Enlightenment failed to see. (WM 263; TM 247) The concept of authority is distorted by the Enlightenment and opposed to freedom and reason, Gadamer claims. In opposition to such a polarization of reason and authority, Gadamer argues that the bestowal of authority is itself an act of reason. (WM 263f; TM 248) One recognizes the superior knowledge of someone else and thereby bestows authority on him or her. Authority is thus to do with knowledge rather than obedience, let alone blind obedience. (Ibid.) Gadamer, then, resists the polarization of authority and reason, of tradition and reason. He calls the Enlightenment extremist, abstract and revolutionary in this respect.[3] (WM 264f; TM 249) The Romantic reaction has value as a corrective, but it too maintains the polarization, merely stressing tradition at the expense of reason. Gadamer wants to undercut the polarization as such. For him tradition and reason interpenetrate one another. Tradition persists not out of its own nature but only because it is affirmed, embraced and cultivated. In its essence tradition is preservation /Bewahrung/ and preservation is, Gadamer claims, an act of reason, albeit an inconspicuous one. (WM 265f; TM 250) It is an illusion that only what is new and planned is the

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[3] This is the basis of Gadamer's criticism of Habermas; see KS I 119ff; PH 26ff.

result of reason. In fact even in times of the most violent change far more of the old is preserved than anyone knows, and this combines with the new to create a new value. (ibid.) Preservation, Gadamer claims, is as much a freely chosen action as revolution and renewal. (ibid.)

Gadamer's argument at this point would seem to be open to question. It is one thing for preservation as an act of reason to be "inconspicuous" /unauffällig/ ; but for it to be by implication unconscious - since even in times of radical change there is always preserved "far more of the old than anyone is aware of" (WM 266; TM 250) - is quite another. How this preservation can be described as "freely chosen action" /ein Verhalten aus Freiheit/ is far from clear. The concept of reason /Vernunft/ plays a shadowy but important role in Truth and Method. We have already been told that the ideal of absolute reason is impossible for man and that:

> Reason exists for us only in concrete historical terms i.e. it is not its own master, but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates.[4]

On the one hand it is clear that Gadamer is following Hegel in rejecting the Enlightenment concepts of reason and freedom as abstract, and in presenting reason and freedom as dialectical concepts immanent in the historical process. Thus he can speak of reason and freedom that are not conscious of themselves. But for Hegel it was always the case that reason and freedom at a given stage in history might not yet be conscious of themselves. This "yet" is of crucial importance since it is only on the basis of the total self-awareness or self-mediation of reason and freedom in Absolute Knowledge that

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[4] WM 260; TM 245

their presence in history could be asserted at all. Only in the light of the end, that is, Hegel's own System, could the operation of reason and freedom be seen in the process. But Gadamer explicitly rejects in principle the possibility of any such Absolute Knowledge, or total self-awareness. It seems he wants to appropriate the immanent, dialectical, historical side of Hegel's thought without the claim to Absolute Knowledge.[5] But to what extent the dialectical concepts of reason and freedom (and also truth) can still have any claim to be recognized as such without being grounded in a self-transparent totality is a crucial question for Gadamer's approach. This question is complicated by the fact that in face of this set of problems Gadamer has recourse to the work of Heidegger. Heidegger's notion of language and his notion of play which Gadamer extensively develops seem to Gadamer to offer a basis on which he can talk of reason, freedom and above all truth in the context of radical historicality and finitude. It is only from this wider philosophical perspective that we can see what lies behind Gadamer's problematic statements about the relation between tradition and reason. Whether these statements can be justified is another question, and one that can only be tackled from within that wider perspective.

The rehabilitation of the concept of prejudice within the context of the dialectical interpenetration of reason and tradition marks an advance in Gadamer's quest for a more authentic historical hermeneutics. Human existence always stands within tradition; human thought can never turn tradition into an object over against an

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[5] cf. David E. Linge's introduction to PH, p.xl.

isolated subjectivity. (WM 266; TM 250) The significance of this for historical hermeneutics is that the abstract opposition between tradition and historical research /Historie/, between living historical reality /Geschichte/ and knowledge, must be abandoned. (WM 267; TM 251) The attitude of the historian is not something radically new; it is merely an explicit concentration on the relation to the past, to tradition, which all human existence has. And as in all human Understanding, so also in the historian's relation to the past, tradition plays an essential role. Tradition is a moment (or structural element) of the historian's understanding of the past, and this moment should be examined in terms of its hermeneutical productivity rather than excluded as "mere prejudice". (WM 266f; TM 250f)

(c) Understanding and "the Classical"

Gadamer pushes forward this enquiry into the hermeneutical productivity of the moment of tradition - or the positive contribution of prejudice - in the activity of the historian with a further attempt to clarify the role that tradition plays in Understanding. He proceeds to this attempted clarification via a brief examination of what is involved in the relation of a so-called "classical" work to the successive generations that encounter it. This examination need not detain us. What emerges, Gadamer claims, is that the term "classical" does not in its real sense name a particular period or style. It rather names a relation between work and its successive audiences. The work is firmly rooted in its own world yet it continues to speak authoritatively into subsequent worlds. The appropriate attitude to the work is not - from some vantage point outside the historical process - to label its form "classical" and perhaps to derive an aesthetic frisson from the form, relegating the content to relative insignificance. The appropriate attitude is rather, from our standpoint within our world, to attend to what the work says to us from out of its world. "Classical" designates the normative status and authority of a work which demands our attention in this way. To examine further Gadamer's presentation of "the classical" would involve us in a discussion of his rather complex critique of modern aesthetics, and this is beyond our present scope.[1] For the moment it is enough to note that Gadamer sees in "the classical" a phenomenon that, far from being an exceptional case, expresses in a

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[1] But see Part Two, Chapter 2 below.

particularly clear way the relation that characterizes the historian's attitude as such. (WM 274; TM 258) Indeed the mediation of past and present that characterizes "the classical" is rooted in the structure of Understanding itself:

> Understanding is not to be thought of so much as an action of one's subjectivity, but as the placing of of oneself within a process of tradition /als Einrucken in ein Überlieferungsgeschehen/, in which past and present are constantly mediated. This is what must be expressed in hermeneutical theory, which is too much dominated by the idea of a procedure, of a method.[2]

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[2] WM 274f; TM 258

(d) Understanding and Time

We have already noted Gadamer's positive estimate of the existential "thrownness" which characterizes all Understanding, and which he interpreted to mean "belongingness to tradition". The nature of this "belongingness to tradition" has now been elaborated to some degree, and in light of this Gadamer proceeds to a closer examination of the structure of Understanding. He begins by distinguishing the circle of Understanding in Being and Time from the hermeneutical circle of nineteenth century hermeneutics. This latter circle was constituted by the to-and-fro movement between whole and parts which characterized the process of understanding a text. But according to Gadamer this mutual determination of whole and parts was seen as a provisional process which was destined, so the nineteenth century theorists believed, to disappear in the complete understanding of the text. At least in principle, all that was strange was ultimately to be resolved into perfect intelligibility (WM 277; TM 261) In Gadamer's view this circle was essentially methodological, that is, it was concerned with the procedures which led up to Understanding. For Heidegger, on the other hand, the circle is ontological, that is, Understanding is in its very nature circular. Understanding is not the result of circular process; Understanding is, and always remains, a circular process. Thus the anticipatory movement of pre-understanding is not dissolved in perfect Understanding but remains a permanent moment of Understanding. (ibid.)

This pre-understanding is not something that derives from our own subjectivity. As we have seen, it is tradition itself that provides our pre-understandings or prejudices. Not that the tradition

which determines our pre-understandings or prejudices - which are, as we saw, by nature unconscious - persists by its own momentum, completely determining human consciousness. Gadamer has already said that the continuance of tradition is dependent on affirmation, on preservation. (WM 265f; TM 250) He now asserts that inasmuch as we understand tradition, we participate in its evolution and further determine it ourselves. (WM 277; TM 261) He means by this, as we shall see shortly, that our meanings or horizon come together with the horizon of the text we encounter to create a new horizon, or "fusion of horizons". The question is however, whether his systematic exclusion of subjectivity from the domain of Understanding allows of any over-againstness of text and interpreter. If self-awareness is merely a flickering in the historical process (WM 261; TM 245), if we are completely dominated by the tradition we belong to, how is that over-againstness possible which Gadamer presupposes in his talk of the preservation and co-determination of tradition? Hermeneutics may have its home in the "between" between the over-againstness of tradition and the belongingness to tradition. (WM 279; TM 263) But how, in Gadamer's own terms, is this "between" possible? Gadamer believes that the answer to this question is - time. Following Heidegger, he turns to time as the transcendental ground of the possibility of experience - in this case the hermeneutical experience. Time is not to be viewed negatively as something that separates, that carries off, that hinders and disrupts the process of Understanding. Time is to be viewed as positive, as creative, as that which makes Understanding possible at all:

> Time is no longer primarily an abyss /Abgrund/ to be bridged because it separates, but is actually the supportive ground of the process in which the present is rooted /der tragende Grund des Geschehens, in dem das Gegenwartige wurzelt/ . . . In fact the important thing is to recognize distance in time as a positive and productive possibility of Understanding.[1]

Although Gadamer does not dwell at any length on the move he makes at this point, but immediately proceeds to give an analysis of the familiar phenomenon of the difficulty we experience in evaluating an artistic production before a certain time has elapsed, it is nevertheless worth bringing into relief the steps he takes here. In fact Gadamer could be accused of playing down the radicality of his position here. He says that distance in time is not really a yawning abyss but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition. (ibid.) But is this not to diminish the force of his positive view of time as the ground of Understanding - and hence to diminish its effectiveness in coping with the problem it was introduced to solve? Perhaps Gadamer is shrinking from the dialectical edge of his position when he says that historical distance is productive because it is secretely continuity, rather than insisting that it is productive as difference, as discontinuity. It is not that time is not really an abyss /Abgrund/, but that it grounds precisely as the groundless abyss. In other words, any appropriation of Heidegger's grounding of Understanding in time cannot evade Heidegger's insistence on thinking Being as Nothingness - an insistence that Gadamer elsewhere draws attention to. (WM 243; TM 288) However much Gadamer's two great sources of inspiration, Hegel and Heidegger, may disagree in their understanding of the phrase "identity -in-

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[1] WM 281; TM 264

difference", they agree on this, that difference is productive because it is difference, not because it is identity in disguise.

Whether or not Gadamer presents his grounding of the movement of Understanding in temporal distance or difference /der zeitliche Abstand/ with as much dialectical sharpness as he might, he hastens to consolidate his contention by drawing attention to the role which temporal distance plays in evaluating a work of art. The difficulty in discriminating between contemporary productions is notorious. It seems that time itself sorts out the wheat from the chaff. Gadamer is anxious that the significance of this phenomenon should not be misinterpreted. He agrees that one of the reasons temporal distance has the effect of discriminating is that it "filters out" those inessential prejudices which, because they find a point of contact in a contemporary work, "over-resonate" and as it were cause a short-circuit in the process of Understanding.[2] (WM 281f; TM 265) While this phenomenon is genuine enough, Gadamer disagrees with the interpretation given of it by historical research. The significance of temporal distance is not that it extinguishes the life-relation we have to a work of art or a text, and thus allows us to be disinterested and "objective". It is rather that it allows the appropriate life-relation - and indeed new life-relations - to emerge. It is not the case, Gadamer insists, that time fixes the meaning of a work; on the

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[2] Such "inessential prejudices" must be distinguished from the contemporary references within a work of art, its "occasionality", which Gadamer is concerned to defend against what he calls "aesthetic differentiation" with its devaluation of the role of content in the work of art; see Part One of Truth and Method passim, especially the section entitled "The ontological foundation of the occasional and the decorative".

contrary, it first opens the work to its possibilities of authentic meaning. The meaning and, as Gadamer wants to say, the truth of a work are not some fixed entities-in-themselves which we can gain access to by the rigorous exclusion of our prejudices. The meaning and truth of the work only exist in the interplay between, on the one hand, the subject-matter of the work and the horizon or set of prejudices in which this is set; and on the other hand, the interpreter's concern with that subject-matter within the horizon or set of prejudices in which he or she is set.

The nature, or as Gadamer wants to say, the logic of this interplay is complex and will be explored at a later stage. Our concern here is the role that temporal distance plays in the interplay or circular process that is Understanding. It is clear that for Gadamer temporal distance is a negative factor which has the positive function of "opening up" the stream of tradition so that the over-againstness occurs that allows the process of Understanding to come into play. The basic relation of the historian to his objects is one of over-againstness, but this is not the over-againstness of the subject-object relation of the natural sciences. This over-againstness is not due to the objectifying activity of subjectivity or consciousness. It is prior to any subjective activity, and is rooted in the activity of time itself. Human understanding is the place, the "there", where the horizons of meaning or prejudices that have been opened up by the elapse of time come into play. These prejudices can come properly into play only to the extent that they become conscious. But for a prejudice

to become conscious means that it no longer has unquestioned, self-evident validity; for a prejudice to come into play /ins Spiel gebracht werden/ it has to be risked /auf dem Spiele gesetzt werden/. (WM 283; TM 265) For Understanding to take place, our own prejudices have to be suspended, called in question. (ibid.) But this suspension of prejudice is not in the control of a methodologically rigorous subjectivity. It is brought about by time itself which breaches the opacity of unbroken prejudice and opens it to the claim of the other which addresses it across the creative void of temporal distance.

However time not only has the function of opening up, as temporal distance, a space where Understanding may take place. As we saw above, Gadamer also wants to say that it has the effect of providing Understanding with the "true" prejudices which allow authentic meaning to occur:

> It is only this temporal distance that can solve the really critical question of hermeneutics, namely of distinguishing the true prejudices, by which we understand, from the false ones by which we misunderstand.[3]

This sentence raises questions which go to the heart of Gadamer's philosophical enterprise, and which will recur throughout our study.[4] Gadamer seems to be saying here that an ontological principle (i.e. time or temporal distance) which allows Understanding to be at all is also in some sense a logical principle in that it is involved in

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[3] WM 282; TM 266 (Gadamer's italics).

[4] See especially Chapter 7 below ("Language, Truth and Correctness").

the decision about the truth or falsehood of particular prejudices. But while the present writer can see how temporal distance can open up the space where that decision may be worked out, he is unable to see how temporal distance could be involved in the actual process in which that decision is worked out, since an ontological principle is strictly neutral with regard to the determinate content of that which it lets be.

However while it may be difficult to see how time can affect the determinate contents and the particular (ontic) understandings that are the result of the (ontological) Understanding process, that process is nevertheless effected by time and remains a thoroughly temporal or historical process. History is always at work /wirkt/ in Understanding; it is a real /wirklich/ and potent /wirksam/ moment in Understanding. Hence Gadamer writes:

> An appropriate hermeneutics would have to show the reality /Wirklichkeit/ of history within Understanding itself. I call this "effective-history" /Wirkungsgeschichte/ Understanding is in essence an effective-historical process.[5]

We will further explore this "effective-historical process" in the next section.

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[5] WM 283; TM 267

(e) Understanding and "Effective-History"

Effective-history is at work in all Understanding. This is so whether we are aware of it or not. A "naïve" faith in method which tries rigorously to exclude the effect of history on Understanding may succeed in distorting Understanding, but even when the historical moment is explicitly denied, Gadamer claims, it nevertheless prevails. (WM 285; TM 268) As a structural moment of Understanding, history cannot fail to be at work in Understanding. Nevertheless it is imperative that scientific self-awareness should attain to an explicit consciousness of effective-history. (ibid.) But effective-history can never wholly be brought to consciousness. It will be recalled that in contrast to the pretensions of nineteenth century hermeneutics Gadamer insisted on the fact that the circle of Understanding cannot be dissolved (even if only in principle) in perfect intelligibility, but that the moment of pre-understanding remains a permanent feature of the circular process of Understanding. (WM 277; TM 261) Another way of saying this is to say that "thrownness" - as an existential - remains a permanent feature of human Understanding, and that the polemical edge of Being and Time against Husserl's transcendental phenomenology was precisely its insistence on the impossibility of getting back behind one's own facticity or "thrownness" into a sphere of ideal intelligibility. (WM 250; TM 234) Again, to bring effective-history to consciousness in its entirety would be to tread the path of Hegel's Absolute Knowledge. But Gadamer says that the hermeneutics he is advocating would take the path of Hegel in precisely the opposite direction. If in this context Hegel's concept of "substance" refers to the historical pre-givenness which,

as the bearer of all subjective activity, prescribes and limits the possibilities of Understanding a piece of tradition; then Gadamer wants to reverse Hegel's path from substance to subject "until we can show in all subjectivity the substantiality that determines it". (WM 286; TM 269) In all this Gadamer is insisting on the radical historicality of human Understanding. To know history in its entirety would mean the end of history. To be historical means for Gadamer not to transcend oneself in total self-knowledge /nie im Sichwissen aufgehen/. (WM 285; TM 269) Yet this renunciation of any sort of total self-knowledge or knowledge of the totality of history, even if only in principle,[1] does not mean that knowledge of truth is unattainable by human beings. The fundamental claim of Truth and Method is that truth is available to human finitude (WM 284f; TM 268), that knowledge is a possibility for finite Understanding, and that this truth and this knowledge are to be had in the openness to that which works powerfully in human Understanding (i.e. effective-history), and not in the closedness of the methods of the natural sciences.

To achieve a strictly scientific hermeneutics means to recognize the inadequacy of the methods of the natural sciences here, and to become conscious of the operation of effective history in Understanding. This consciousness, as we have seen, can never be total.

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[1] This is what distinguishes Gadamer from, for instance, Pannenberg and his claim for provisional knowledge of the totality of history; see Pannenberg's article "Hermeneutics and Universal History", trans. Paul J. Achtemeier in History and Hermeneutic (Journal for Theology and the Church, IV), ed. Robert W. Funk (New York; Harper and Row, 1967), pp.122-152. The original article (ZTK 69 (1963), pp.90-121) is also translated by George H. Kehm in Pannenberg's Basic Questions in Theology, I (London: SCM, 1970), pp.96-136.

In order to express this, Gadamer introduces the concepts of the situation and of the horizon. It belongs to the nature of being in a situation that we cannot have the sort of complete knowledge of it that presupposes that we are already outside of it. (WM 285; TM 269) Similarly "horizon" indicates the fact that thought is tied to its finite determinateness. (WM 286; TM 269) The task for hermeneutics is to show how the process of Understanding takes place when all Understanding takes place within a horizon. Gadamer is suspicious of any attempt to understand the horizon of the other as such. This sort of "understanding" may have its place in certain circumstances, for example in an examination or in an interview between doctor and patient, where the aim of the "conversation" is to discover the horizon of the student or patient as such. What is significant in these pseudo-conversations is that the standpoint of the person attempting to understand is exempted from any part in the process of Understanding. The consequence of this is that, in principle, what the other says cannot be true. What he or she says is only a means towards establishing his or her perspective or horizon. Real Understanding, according to Gadamer, is not the attempt to discover the other's horizon as such, but is the coming to an understanding or agreement /Verständigung/ with someone about something.[2]

Although understanding a historical text is only analogous to a conversation, nevertheless it too must be protected from this type of pseudo-understanding that is the great weakness of historicism. Historicism falls into this trap when it attempts to understand a

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[2] On the above, cf. Part One, Chapter 4 below.

text entirely in a text's own terms, within the text's "own historical perspective". Then it thinks it understands what the text "means", without itself agreeing with it /ohne dass man sich doch mit ihr und in ihr versteht/. (WM 287; TM 270) In these circumstances the text cannot say anything true:

> The text that is understood historically is formally deprived of its claim to say anything true. When we see tradition from the historicist standpoint, that is, place ourselves in the historical situation and try to reconstruct the historical horizon, we think we understand. But in truth we have abandoned the claim to find in tradition any truth which is valid and intelligible for ourselves.[3]

The assumption that in Understanding a historical text we can disregard ourselves is fundamentally wrong-headed, Gadamer believes. In placing ourselves in the situation of the other, who do we place but ourselves? (WM 288; TM 272) And we are who we are only within our own horizon. Are we then faced with a series of independent self-contained horizons in which the occupants are imprisoned? Gadamer dismisses as an abstraction the notion of a closed horizon which encloses a culture, as the cultural equivalent of solipsism. (WM 288; TM 271) In Gadamer's view, a horizon is not something fixed, static, but is always already moving. It belongs to the historicality of human existence that it is not bound to one standpoint, but is always on the move. "For someone on the move, horizons shift." (WM 288; TM 271) The real problem Gadamer faces, however, is not how to show that horizons shift. The problem of the fixed horizon, like that of solipsism, can be shown to be a pseudo-problem, an abstraction, by

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[3] WM 287; TM 270

an appeal to experience. The real question for Gadamer is how there can be any continuity between these shifting horizons, how there can be any unity in the undoubted diversity. Gadamer's solution is language itself, or the "centre of language", which mediates all intelligibility. Hence we must postpone our discussion of the problem of the One and the Many in Gadamer until our chapters on language.[4]

Understanding, then, involves two horizons, the horizon of the text and that of the interpreter. Neither may be disregarded, either by naïve assimilation or by "objective" historicism. Neither stands in splendid isolation, is "for itself" only. The horizon of the interpreter, that of the present, is no more fixed than that of the past; it is constantly being formed, and this formation /Bildung/ takes place precisely in the encounter with the past. (WM 289; TM 273) The horizon of the past is not accessible to us "in itself" (as historicism would like to think, even if only as an ideal limiting case) but always and only "for us". Thus it is not the case, according to Gadamer, that there are first of all two distinct horizons, as it were simply "given", which are subsequently related to each other. Each horizon is recognized in its distinctness only by being distinguished from the other, and this distinguishing is reciprocal. (WM 289; TM 272) The work of Understanding is to bring together the two horizons that have been thus distinguished. Gadamer calls this process the blending or fusion of horizons /Horizontverschmelzung/; thus "Understanding is always the occurrence of the fusion of these horizons which we imagine to exist 'for themselves'". (ibid.)

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[4] cf. especially chapter 8(a) and (b) below.

The adequate historical hermeneutics which Gadamer envisages will be one which consciously develops the difference between its own horizon and that of the text only to overcome this difference by fusing these two together into a new horizon which contains both. In Gadamer's words:

> The historical consciousness is conscious of its own otherness and so distinguishes the horizon of what is handed down from its own horizon. On the other hand, it is itself, as we tried to show, merely as it were superimposed over a tradition continually at work, and so immediately retrieves that which it distinguished from itself, so that it may, in the unity of the historical horizon thus acquired, mediate itself to itself.[5]

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[5] WM 290; TM 273

(f) Understanding and Subjectivity

In this attempt to sketch out the basis for an adequate historical hermeneutics Gadamer tries to affirm what is true and expose what is false in both the unselfconscious assimilation of the past by the naïve attitude to history, and the self-denying "objectivity" of historicism. The naïve attitude is true insofar as it relates the past to its present horizon, that is, fuses the horizons of past and present into the unity of one horizon; it is false insofar as it fails to take into account the difference between these horizons. Historicism is the reverse of the naïve attitude in that it rightly stresses the difference between the horizons, yet fails to see that this difference only arises out of the relation between these two horizons in the Understanding, which is itself precisely the process of transforming this difference into unity. To use Hegelian terminology, in which this section of Truth and Method already abounds, the difference in horizons is posited only to be cancelled, transcended and preserved [aufgehoben]. In Gadamer's own words:

> The projection of the historical horizon is thus only a phase or moment in the fulfilment of Understanding, and does not become fixed in the self-estrangement of a past consciousness, but is overtaken by our own present horizon of Understanding. In the fulfilment of Understanding there occurs a true fusion of horizons, which, as the historical horizon is projected, simultaneously cancels, transcends and preserves it.[1]

The main question at this point would seem to be how all this dialectical activity on the part of the historical consciousness relates to Gadamer's critique of subjectivism and his grounding of the process of Understanding in a trans- or non-subjective activity. Gadamer has

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[1] WM 290; TM 273

stressed the priority of tradition over any subjective contribution to the process of Understanding. Tradition provides the horizons or prejudices which are brought into play in the event of Understanding. Time first makes Understanding possible by opening up a space where Understanding may take place. Time also, Gadamer would have us believe, somehow selects which prejudices are to be brought into play. Sometimes the impression is given that human Understanding is merely the place, the "there", where tradition, as it were, plays with itself. Yet now Gadamer seems to be saying that it is the historical consciousness which projects the historical horizon, that the historical difference is posited by the historical consciousness in order to mediate itself to itself. To put this contrast crudely; sometimes it seems as if man were there for history, and at other times as if history were there for man.

Gadamer would probably counter these observations by saying that the historical consciousness does not actively constitute the horizons, nor the difference between them, nor their fusion. The role of the historical consciousness is to bring to explicit consciousness that which happens of its own accord. Standing firmly in the phenomenological tradition going back to Hegel, Gadamer would probably claim to be describing the movement or activity of "the things themselves", and not in any way contributing to that activity, except perhaps in the negative way of preventing distorted interpretations of this activity from hindering its smooth operation. Thus the historical difference would not in fact be posited by historical consciousness; the activity of the latter would consist rather "in

not covering up the difference in naïve assimilation but in consciously unfolding it". (WM 290; TM 273) And yet the term "projection" /Entwurf/ of the historical horizon raises the question of how it conforms with the fact that according to Gadamer, it is the other that asserts itself? These apparent difficulties are no doubt connected with the fact that Gadamer sees an essential unity in the work of Heidegger, which would permit him to use a term like "projection", which comes from the existential analytic of Being and Time, in a context which receives its main inspiration from the writings of Heidegger after the "turn". From this perspective any difficulties of the sort we have mentioned would in the end be merely terminological. The terminology of Being and Time may be ill-suited to express the thought of Heidegger after the "turn", but there is no real conflict here. Indeed, according to Gadamer, the so-called "turn" is already implicit in Being and Time. As we have seen, Gadamer plays down the differences between the earlier and later Heidegger. But the transition from Being and Time to the later work may be more problematic than Gadamer allows for. The dialectic of activity and passivity in the Understanding process which R.E.Palmer finds in Gadamer and prefers to the passivity which he says characterizes later Heidegger [2] may be more open to question than Palmer believes. However the validity of Gadamer's interpretation of Heidegger must remain for

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[2] See Richard E. Palmer, Hermeneutics (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), pp.216f. According to John Macquarrie the development of Heidegger's thought as a whole constitutes a "massive dialectic"; see his Martin Heidegger (London: Lutterworth, 1968), pp.8ff; also his article "Heidegger's Earlier and Later Work Compared" in Thinking About God (London: SCM, 1975), pp.191-203. Such a dialectic is different from, though no doubt related to, a "dialectic of the Understanding" in Palmer's essay.

us an open question, the pursuit of which would take us too far from our present task.

We may come at this question about the "subjective" dimension of Gadamer's hermeneutics from a slightly different angle by asking about the relation between the process of Understanding and the historical consciousness's consciousness of that process. Gadamer tells us that the historical consciousness does not cover up the difference between text and interpreter in naïve assimilation, but "consciously unfolds it". What exactly does he mean by this latter phrase? Although Gadamer would want to say, as we have seen, that historical consciousness does not have a constitutive role in the Understanding process, but merely describes what takes place, it is difficult to banish the impression that in fact it is only with the activity of historical consciousness described here that the process of Understanding functions fully.[3] Gadamer may give us to believe that the only way historical consciousness contributes to the process of Understanding is in the negative way of preventing distorted interpretations of the Understanding process from hampering that process. But disguised in that negative is the positive implication that only with this remedial activity of historical consciousness does the Understanding process take place properly at all. Then we may legitimately ask: in what sense does bringing the historical difference to consciousness make the difference effective for the first time? To say that historical consciousness "unfolds" the difference strongly

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[3] cf. the essay "Hermeneutics and Historicism" where Gadamer stresses the need for a consciousness of the pre-understanding that is always in play, if we are to be serious about the scientific nature of our work. (WM 495, note 2; TM 536, note 40. Gadamer's italics)

suggests that it first brings the difference fully into play. The fact that Gadamer resolves the opposite errors of the naïve attitude to history and of historicism with his own dialectical concept of the fusion of horizons suggests that in some sense Understanding does not come fully into its own until the appearance of Gadamer's own description of Understanding. This is not to suggest that Gadamer is proclaiming a new ideal of Understanding which prior to him was in some sense non-existent; the structure that Gadamer describes is, he would claim, absolutely prior, in this sense transcendental, and immanent in all Understanding. Our suggestion is that this immanent structure does not actually fulfil itself until made fully conscious and that takes place for the first time in Gadamer's description of Understanding.

The question then forces itself on us: is there implicit in Gadamer's treatment of Understanding something similar to what Hegel explicitly claimed - that reason, as the structure of reality, is absolutely prior to the world and history, and yet is only fully itself when it becomes conscious of itself through the development of the cosmic process, specifically in Hegel's own description of that development towards self-consciousness? Certainly Gadamer would disclaim any such absolutization of his own position. He constantly stresses the need to take seriously the finitude and historicality of human thought. But at this point there is a temptation to make the move so beloved of Idealism, that is, to question the relation of a statement of a principle to the principle which is stated (e.g. the statement "there is no truth" presupposes that it itself is true). Gadamer is wary of what he calls such "specious"

logic.[4] But how exactly does Gadamer's assertion of radical historicality relate to radical historicality? It seems that for Gadamer to say what he wants to say, that is, to take seriously both the reality of history and the reality of reason (or intelligibility) in history, he can hardly avoid (though he continually strives to do so) some position at least analogous to Hegel's.

In response to such a suggestion Gadamer, as we have seen, could claim with a certain degree of plausibility that in his description of Understanding the historical consciousness does not have any constitutive role. But in doing so he would merely be fending off something analogous to "subjective idealism" (it is perhaps significant that Being and Time is sometimes seen - mistakenly Gadamer would assert - as propounding something akin to "subjective idealism"). Hegel too rejected "subjective idealism",[5] yet he is accused of "subjectivism", for instance when Gadamer announces his intention to reverse Hegel's move from substance to subject. (WM 286; TM 269) This "subjectivism" would consist in the fact that in the development of the world culminating in art, religion and philosophy, and ultimately in Hegel's own philosophy, the Idea mediates itself to itself, that is, it becomes a Self or a Subject. Human thought, human consciousness, is where reason fulfils itself. But this seems not too far removed from Gadamer's own position. In his attempt to overcome subjectivism via the concept of play, Gadamer himself calls the work of art or the game the real "subject" of the play process.

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[4] WM 327; TM 308f. cf. WM 422f; TM 406f; see also our next chapter, passim.

[5] See J.N. Findlay's Hegel: A Re-Examination (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958), pp.22f, 289.

(WM 98, 102; TM 92, 95f) The question which poses itself is this: is Gadamer as much - or as little - a "subjectivist" as Hegel? That Gadamer is sensitive to this issue can be seen in his essay "The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century" when he asks whether the critique of the subject in our century is anything more than a repetition - and an inferior repetition at that - of the achievement of German Idealism. (KS I 141; PH 119) However Gadamer rejects such a suggestion on the grounds that modern thought differs radically from German Idealism because of what he calls the latter's naïveté with regard to the assertion (see KSI 141-3;PH119-122), to reflection (see KSI 143-5;PH 122-125), and to the concept (see KSI 145-7 PH 125-127). Gadamer's pages on the naïveté of reflection will be referred to in the following chapter which is devoted to the problem of reflexive philosophy. However it is beyond our present scope to describe and discuss all these various forms of Idealism's so-called naïveté. What in Gadamer's view they have in common is their failure to recognize the radical historicality and non-subjective nature of human existence and Understanding. We always are and understand more than we know we are and understand. But is it necessarily so naïve to ask about the status of our knowledge of this ignorance? And is it not the case that Gadamer's play of Understanding cannot fully and properly take place until it is <u>known</u> as play? Perhaps it is more difficult than it seems to purge all traces of "subjectivity" and "consciousness" from the Understanding process. The human mind has a tenacious tendency towards self-transcendence, towards becoming aware of its own awareness. Gadamer's grappling with this tendency will be the theme of the following Chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LIMITS OF REFLEXIVE PHILOSOPHY

The question which arose at the end of the previous chapter as to the relation between the event or process of Understanding and the explicit consciousness of that event or process could be formulated in a more general and formal way as the question as to how Gadamer can maintain his insistence on the radical finitude and historicality of Understanding in face of the reflexivity which certain philosophers would claim was inherent in all knowledge. Does not the characteristic of human thought to turn back on itself, to know its own knowing, mean that human thought has an inherent tendency to self-transcendence which can only come to rest when the knower, the known and the knowing are so united that further differentiation is impossible? And leaving aside the question of the attainability of this all-embracing term of human thought, must we not ask whether the reflexive or self-transcending nature of human thought does not mean at the very least that the attempt to present Understanding as sheerly historical and unsurmountably finite is self-refuting? Or as Gadamer himself puts it, do not the immanent laws of reflexion dissolve the immediacy of the effective-historical consciousness whose characteristic feature is its dependance on, and determination by, history and tradition? (WM 324; TM 306) And if we insist on the immediacy of the effective-historical consciousness, is not the very possibility of historical Understanding undermined? Are we not forced to admit that Hegel was right, and to accept that hermeneutics can only be grounded in the absolute mediation of history and truth? (ibid.)

It is with this clutch of questions that Gadamer begins his analysis of the effective-historical consciousness in terms of the concept of experience and the logic of the question. The latter notions are in effect intended to provide an answer to precisely these questions. They represent an attempt to work out a concept of Understanding as effective-historical consciousness which will take with full seriousness the claim of reflexive philosophy in general, and of Hegel in particular, to have overcome dialectically any attempt to impose limits on human thought. The analysis of effective-historical consciousness begins with a section entitled significantly (and perhaps a little ironically) "The Limits of Reflexive Philosophy".

An important consideration which leads Gadamer to come to terms with Hegel's reflexive philosophy is that although much of nineteenth century post-Hegelian thought on the problems of historical Understanding more or less explicitly disavowed Hegel, and tended to invoke Schleiermacher or Humboldt rather than Hegel (WM 324; TM 306), in point of fact, Gadamer claims, it had not got beyond Hegel at all; nor had it (nor had Schleiermacher or Humboldt for that matter) attained a position which was independent of Hegel. For it the miracle of historical Understanding was ultimately grounded in the infinity of knowledge, in the Absolute where thought and Being interpenetrate. (WM 324f; TM 306) According to Gadamer the criticism of reflexive philosophy that applies to Hegel applies also to the whole development of the historicist perspective from Schleiermacher to Dilthey. For this reason it is important for Gadamer's proposed approach to the problem of historical Understanding to wrestle with the claim of reflexive philosophy as exemplified by Hegel. Gadamer

wants to take to heart the criticism of Hegel by the Young Hegelians (WM 325; TM 306) without taking flight into irrationalism (WM 325; TM 307).

Despite his resolve to resist the lure of reflexive philosophy, Gadamer nevertheless fully acknowledges the compelling power of Hegel's thought. Hegel's critics have never really been able to break the spell of his reflexive philosophy, he says. (ibid.) Hegel's presentation of the self-mediation of the Absolute Idea, especially in the Phenomenology of Spirit, is such that there can never be a fixed, independent standpoint on the basis of which one could resist the power of the Idea to draw all isolated entities into its dialectical development towards total self-presence. There is no entity which is so irreducibly immediate that it is not susceptible of being integrated through the all-powerful movement of mediation into the developing totality. The limits Kant had tried to impose on the infinite expansion of thought are swept aside with the critique of the "thing-in-itself" and with the dialectic of the limit. The unknowable "thing-in-itself" is only "in-itself" for consciousness, that is, it is merely a moment in the development of consciousness; and to know a limit as a limit implies that our knowledge goes beyond the limit. (WM 325f; TM 307) It is vain to oppose some irreducible Other to the dialectical process of mediation; for this process is precisely about discovering the self in the Other and thereby becoming reconciled with the Other. The objections of Kierkegaard and Feuerbach are taken care of in advance in the Phenomenology of Spirit. (WM 326; TM 308) According to Gadamer such objections are always self-refuting:

> The insistence on immediacy - whether of bodily nature, of the Thou which makes claims on us, of the impenetrable factuality of historical chance, or of the reality of the relations of production - is always self-refuting insofar as it is no immediate attitude but a reflective activity.[1]

Yet despite the apparent irresistibility of the reflexive argument, Gadamer nevertheless wants to question its validity; does it, he asks, correspond to "a factual truth" /einer sachlichen Wahrheit/? (WM 326f; TM 308) In the end, he claims, it is impossible for the arguments of reflexive philosophy to obscure the fact that the criticism of speculative thought from the standpoint of finite human consciousness contains some truth. (ibid.) That scepticism or relativism are self-refuting to the extent that they claim to be true may be an irrefutable argument. But what, Gadamer asks, is thereby achieved? (WM 327; TM 308f) It is not the reality of scepticism or relativism that is thereby called in question, but that of formal argument. (WM 327; TM 309) This sort of argument is the descendant of the arguments of the Greek sophists. Their great critic Plato had already seen that there is no way of distinguishing on the level of argument between a genuinely philosophical use of language and a sophisitcal one, Gadamer claims; the fact that an argument can be formally refuted does not necessarily tell against its truth. (ibid.)

But Gadamer does not want to include Hegel in his condemnation of sophistry. Hegel is, he claims, above such argumentative formalism. (WM 328; TM 310) Hegel also opposed the empty arguments of the Understanding /der Verstand/, which he called "external reflexion". His

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[1] WM 326f; TM 308

attempt to achieve a total mediation of history and the present is not a matter of reflexive formalism; it is an attempt to think through to the end the dimension of history which is also the matter with which hermeneutics in general and Gadamer in particular is concerned. (ibid.) For this reason Gadamer's presentation of the effective-historical consciousness must be worked out with constant reference to Hegel. (ibid.) This elaboration will begin with an examination of experience, since the way in which Hegel's Spirit returns to itself is not through any merely formal "Aufhebung" of its self-alienation, but through experience which experiences reality and is itself real. (WM 329; TM 310)

Gadamer's rejection of reflexive philosophy is not then intended to be a refutation, since he is calling in question the "factual truth" of reflexive philosophy despite the irrefutability of its arguments. Is he then indulging in a form of stone-kicking, that is, appealing to immediate experience despite his recognition that such an appeal is, from a formal point of view, self-refuting? Gadamer at this point does seem to be making an appeal to experience, to our "sense of reality". And although he will not attempt to demonstrate formally the truth of his rejection of reflexive philosophy, he will nevertheless attempt in some measure to justify it by giving an account of experience which will attempt to show, if not to demonstrate rigorously, that the finite structure of experience is the authentic mode of human Understanding.

Before turning to this analysis of experience, it is perhaps worth drawing attention to other references in Gadamer's published

writings to the problem of reflexive philosophy. In his essay "The Phenomenological Movement" (1963),[2] he suggests that Kant's insistence on the limits of human thought must be seen as in some sense final:

> It seems to me that it is essential for taking finitude seriously as the basis of experience of Being that such experience renounce all dialectical supplementation. Certainly it is "obvious" /einleuchtend/ that finitude is a privative determination of thought and as such presupposes infinity, and also that "phenomenological immanence" presupposes its opposite, transcendance, or history, or (in another way) nature. Who will deny that? I believe, however, that we have learned once and for all from Kant that such "obvious" ways of thought can mediate no possible knowledge to us finite beings. Dependence on possible experience and demonstration by means of it remains the alpha and omega of all responsible thought.[3]

It is unclear whether Gadamer thinks that Kant could be said to have demonstrated the unsurmountable finitude of human thought, although in view of what he says in Truth and Method this seems unlikely. What is clear is that he does not dispute the "obviousness" of the reflexive argument. But despite this "obviousness" he takes his stand with Kant on the finitude of human thought. It is significant, however, that he finds it necessary to re-introduce the idea of the infinite in the following paragraph when he says that our thinking is based on language which is "finite in an infinite way". What exactly Gadamer means by "finite in an infinite way" will be examined at a later stage. For the moment it is sufficient to note this example

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[2] KS III 150-189; PH 130-181

[3] KS III 184; PH 172. The English translation has missed out a line of the original. For the definitiveness of Kant on this issue, cf. WM xxii; TM xxiv.

of the way in which the characteristic motifs of reflexive philosophy tend to re-appear in Gadamer's writings - no doubt in a radically modified form - despite his repudiation of such philosophy.

In the essay "The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century" (1962)[4] Gadamer discusses what he calls "the naïveté of reflexion", which, as we saw in the previous chapter, along with the naïveté of the concept and the naïveté of the assertion /des Setzens/ separates contemporary thought from that of German Idealism. This passage is significant for our present concern because here Gadamer does seem to offer some form of argument against reflexive philosophy. He argues here that not all knowledge or consciousness is objectifying. For example, when I hear a musical note, I am also conscious of my hearing of that note. But this consciousness is "non-objectifying"; my hearing is not the object of subsequent reflection. A note is always a "heard note", that is, my awareness of my hearing is always an integral element of the note's being heard. Gadamer claims that this is what Aristotle meant by calling every aisthēsis an aisthēsis aisthēseos:

> Every perception is perception of the perceiving and of the perceived in one, and in no way contains "reflection" in the modern sense. Aristotle gives the phenomenon as it showed itself to him, namely, as a unity. Aristotle's commentators were the first to systematize and to associate the perception of the perceiving with the concept of koinē aisthēsis which Aristotle had used in another connection.[5]

This idea found its way via Brentano into modern phenomenology, and in particular is of fundamental importance to the work of Heidegger,

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[4] KS I 131-148; PH 107-129

[5] KS I 144; PH 123

Gadamer says. Its importance lies above all in the fact that it undermines the movement of reflexivity before the latter gets underway. The indubitable fact that we are aware of our own awareness is accounted for by this theory without assuming that our awareness of our awareness is of the same order as the original awareness.[6] The idea that there can be a consciousness which accompanies our consciousness but is of a different sort (i.e. is "non-objectifying") would seem, if valid, to prevent the self-transcending ascent of consciousness from getting off the ground.

This idea of a non-objectifying consciousness which accompanies consciousness was expressed by Heidegger, Gadamer tells us, in terms of the actus exercitus in contrast to the actus signatus, a distinction which Heidegger derived from scholastic philosophy and turned to his own ends. As Gadamer writes in "Heidegger and Marburg Theology" (1964):[7]

> Heidegger was dealing with a scholastic distinction and spoke of the difference between the actus signatus and the actus exercitus. These scholastic concepts correspond roughly to the concepts "reflexive" and "immediate" and mean, for example, the difference that there is between asking a question and being able to direct attention explicitly to questioning as questioning . . . To cancel this transition from the immediate and direct into the reflexive intention seemed to us at that time to be a way to freedom. It promised a liberation from the inescapable circle of reflection . . .[8]

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[6] cf. WM 424; TM 407 where Gadamer writes: "It is one of the prejudices (!) of reflexive philosophy that it understands as a relationship of propositions that which is not at all on the same logical level".

[7] KS I 82-92; PH 198-211

[8] KS I 85; PH 202

The consequence of this idea for Gadamer's concept of Understanding as effective-historical consciousness is that in historical Understanding (and for Gadamer all Understanding is in the end historical) it is not our consciousness that is ultimately the determining factor. Indeed in "Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century" Gadamer doubts whether our usual notion of consciousness as consciousness of something is an appropriate way of conceiving the Understanding process at all (KS I 145; PH 125) What is determinative in the Understanding process or event, Gadamer wants to say, is the being-understood of the object that comes to language in the Understanding event. Our awareness of this event of Understanding is not consciousness of it in the sense of objectifying consciousness, that is, not a consciousness that from a position of detached reflection can take cognizance of this event. By analogy with the "heard tone", the aisthēsis aisthēseos of Aristotle according to Gadamer, our awareness of the event in some sense inheres in the event itself. No doubt we can subsequently turn the event of Understanding into an object of detached reflection (as Gadamer arguably does in Truth and Method); the actus exercitus may no doubt become the actus signatus; but this is to engage in another event of Understanding which cannot contribute directly to the first. By making the object that comes to language in the event of Understanding determinative, and by granting us an awareness of that event only by participation in it, Gadamer seeks to deprive reflexive consciousness of its autonomy vis-a-vis the object, and hence of its ability to elevate [aufheben] the isolated object into the developing totality of thought. Such continuity as there is between events of Understanding resides in the object, not in the dialectical development of consciousness.

Understanding thus envisaged remains dependent on the object which it cannot elevate into the dialectical play of infinite consciousness, though human consciousness may be elevated into the dialectical play, finite and historical through and through, of objects that have come to be in language. In this latter case consciousness is what Gadamer calls effective-historical consciousness. In his own words:

> The "Understanding" that Heidegger described as the basic movement of There-being is not an "act" of subjectivity but a mode of Being. By proceeding from the special case of the Understanding of tradition, I myself have shown that Understanding is always an event. The issue here is not simply that a non-objectifying consciousness always accompanies the process of Understanding, but rather that Understanding is not suitably conceived at all as a consciousness of something, since the whole process of Understanding itself enters into an event, is brought about by it /"von ihm gezeitigt wird" might also have been translated, following Heidegger, "is temporalized by it"/, and is permeated /durchwirkt/ by it. The freedom of reflection, this apparent self-sufficiency /Bei-sich-selbst-sein/, does not occur at all in Understanding, so much is Understanding determined by the historicality of our existence.[9]

How much weight, then, is Gadamer prepared to lay upon what we might for the sake of convenience refer to as the actus exercitus idea? Whether the fact that in the passage quoted above from "Heidegger and Marburg Theology" Gadamer says that "at that time", that is, in Heidegger's Marburg years (1923-8), it seemed to him to be "a way to freedom" should be taken to indicate a subsequent waning of confidence is not entirely clear. The fact that he does not make reference to this idea in Truth and Method when he is explicitly concerned with the refutation of reflexive philosophy is perhaps significant. On

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[9] KS I 145; PH 125

the other hand, in "Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century" he seems to attach considerable importance to this idea as a weapon with which to attack reflexive philosophy. Perhaps the safest conclusion to draw is that, while he thinks the idea makes a valid point, he entertains doubts about its value as an argument, since he concedes the impotence of all argument against the claims of reflexive philosophy. But in the end he holds, as we have seen, that this merely shows the impotence of formal arguments as a means of establishing truth.

If we take this latter stance, however, we are obliged to say in what other ways we would go about establishing the truth of our understanding of the nature of truth. Gadamer's response would presumably be that we can only hope to convince in an honest fashion (rather than by spurious sophistical argumentation) by a careful description of experience. This is to go the way of the phenomenological approach to truth, which, in the case of Heidegger at least, might be said to presuppose the "truth" that it is the aim of the phenomenological description to reveal. That his attempt to uncover "truth" with his existential analytic of There-being could be accused of "circularity" Heidegger openly admits.[10] However such "circularity" is not merely a logical short-coming, Heidegger claims, but is grounded in the structure of There-being.[11] To ground this "circularity" in the circular structure of finite There-being is to offer uncompromising resistence to any attempt by reflexive thought to overthrow his

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[10] BT 362ff

[11] ibid.

position by pointing to its "circularity". This petitio princpii is not a logical shortcoming but is a direct expression of the fore-structure of Understanding; it is rooted in the very structure of There-being and ultimately of Being itself. We might perhaps express the claim which Heidegger makes as follows: the fact that his attempt to uncover truth presupposes itself does not mean it is self-refuting as reflexive philosophy thinks; nor does it merely indicate the limits of human knowledge as the Kantians think; rather it is the very mark of its truthfulness. The finitude of human knowing is not a limit to be transcended dialectically, nor a limit to be acknowledged with modest self-restraint, but is rather the positive condition of that knowing; far from denying access to Being and truth, it is what lets them be. As Heidegger will make explicit later, un-truth is not evidence of a one-sidedness which needs to be transcended towards the Whole which is the truth; nor is it evidence of the unsurmountable incapacity of the human mind for truth; rather it is the mystery which witnesses to the presence of truth. Authentic un-truth is neither isolated part, nor inevitable defect, but the home, the haven, of truth.[12]

Whether or not Gadamer is ultimately prepared to accept these consequences of his position in all their radicalness is a question we must ask later. Meanwhile we may conclude this chapter by suggesting that the question of the adequacy of the actus exercitus idea as an argument against reflexive philosophy is, besides being beyond the scope of this study, for us merely academic to the extent that Gadamer chooses to rest his case elsewhere. It is important, however,

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[12] For a discussion of Heidegger's On the Essence of Truth, see Richardson, op.cit., pp.211-254; cf. Mehta, The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger (New York: Harper Torch books, 1971), pp.97-104.

in that it offers a clue as to how Gadamer would answer the question of the relation between his analysis of the Understanding process as effective-historical consciousness and that process itself. But although showing the direction in which Gadamer's answer would lie, it nevertheless fails to satisfy in its present undeveloped form. One need not be an exponent of reflexive philosophy to perceive obscurities in the relation of the analysis of Understanding in Truth and Method (or in Being and Time for that matter) to Understanding itself.

We must now turn to Gadamer's analysis of experience both in order to see how he makes good his case for the finitude of the Understanding process against the claims of reflexive philosophy, and also to see whether we are given any further illumination on the relation between the formal analysis of the Understanding process and that process itself.

CHAPTER THREE

GADAMER'S CONCEPT OF EXPERIENCE

The importance of the concept of experience for Gadamer's analysis of Understanding in terms of effective-historical consciousness is that for him the latter has the structure of experience. (WM 329; TM 310) But according to Gadamer the concept of experience is a most obscure one. (ibid.) The treatment it has received in connection with its important role in the natural sciences has tended, Gadamer believes, to narrow the breadth and richness of the concept. The principle deficiency which orientation towards the natural sciences has brought about in the concept of experience has been its failure to take adequate account of what Gadamer calles "the inner historicality of experience". (WM 329; TM 311) It is this dimension which Gadamer wishes to restore to the concept of experience, thus fitting it for the task of supporting his analysis of effective-historical consciousness.

What Gadamer seems to see as the most significant departure of his handling of the concept of experience from its traditional treatment is his intention to go beyond (or perhaps behind) the merely "teleological" interpretation of experience. By this he appears to mean, roughly speaking, that his intention is no longer to view experience merely as a stage in the development of knowledge or science, but as a process worthy of attention in its own right. This will entail a re-valuation of those aspects of experience which have been seen as irrelevant to, or impediments to, the development of scientific knowledge. This latter phrase must be taken in its widest possible sense, since the

knowledge in the interests of which aspects of experience have been suppressed covers both the "science" with which Aristotle was concerned as well as the body of knowledge amassed by the modern natural sciences. Thus Gadamer's identification of the "teleological" interpretation of experience points to deep-seated tendency of human thought which runs from Aristotle to the methodological ideals of the modern natural sciences. This tendency is to subordinate experience to knowledge, process to result, historicality to a timeless present. The aspects of experience which tend to be suppressed are its historicality, as we have already noted, and its linguisticality. The goal of science, so it is believed, is to liberate itself from the snares set by these latter and to attain to a realm of pure intelligibility. For all the differences between the Greek Enlightenment and the modern "scientific" age, they have these fundamental orientations in common. Thus Gadamer does not wish to locate the causes of the truncated view of experience merely in the domination of the modern world by natural science. Not only does the "teleological" interpretation of experience have a long line of ancestors in the history of ideas, it also has its roots in ordinary, non-scientific experience. Moreover Gadamer has no wish to deny that it contains an element of truth:

> In analysing the concept of experience . . . we cannot limit ourselves to the teleological aspect, from which until now the problem has been considered. This is not to say that this aspect has not correctly grasped a true element in the structure of experience. The fact that experience is valid, so long as it is not contradicted by new experience . . . is clearly characteristic of the general nature of experience, no matter whether we are dealing with its scientific form, in the modern experiment, or with the experience of daily life that men have always had.[1]

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[1] WM 332f; TM 314

In point of fact Gadamer has very little to say about the "teleological" interpretation of experience in everyday life, nor does he discuss the origin of this deep-seated tendency of human thought which manifests itself both in the world of scientific research and in everyday life. He limits himself to brief discussions of Aristotle, Bacon and Husserl. These discussions are illuminating and convincing, but some discussion of the question why these truncations of experience should occur in life and in thought would have been helpful, especially since these truncations parallel the truncations in the human sciences which the concept of experience has been introduced in order to overcome. Clearly Gadamer's critique of the "teleological" interpretation of experience parallels Heidegger's critique of thinking Being as "present-at-hand" /Vorhanden/, as pure presence /Anwesenheit/, and the latter's attempt to trace this "forgetfulness of Being" (Being as historical, linguistic and finite) back to the Greeks. But for whatever reason, Gadamer makes no reference to Heidegger at this point (except in another connection). Perhaps Gadamer is, as he says in the Foreword to the second edition of Truth and Method (WM xxiii; TM xxv), less "radical" than Heidegger in the sense that he is less inclined to go the roots of "forgetfulness of Being" and is more inclined to document its symptoms. This more modest enterprise is no doubt an important one; nevertheless at some stage we must ask about that which grounds the history of ideas and, for that matter, everyday life. The asking of ultimate questions may not be the only human task, as Gadamer says (ibid.); but it is nevertheless the characteristically human one.

In whatever way Gadamer would answer the question as to the origins of the "teleological" interpretation of experience, he believes another important feature of the latter is its tendency to overlook the negativity that characterizes experience. Since this interpretation focuses attention on the result of experience (i.e. knowledge), such negativity as is involved in the process whereby that knowledge is reached tends to be overlooked. It is difficult to know with any precision how far-reaching Gadamer intends this criticism to be. He says:

> If we look at experience in this way in terms of its result, its real character as a process is overlooked. This process is, in fact, essentially negative. It cannot be described simply as the unbroken development of typical universals. This development takes place, rather, by continually false generalizations being refuted by experience and what was regarded as typical being shown not to be so.[2]

As it stands, this is merely a criticism of the Aristotelian road to science via experience and induction. Presumably it is intended also to embrace modern understandings of induction which see scientific research primarily as the verification of generalizations, that is, where the emphasis is placed on the positive establishing of generalizations. How Gadamer would respond to the more recent view of scientific research which emphasises precisely the negative aspect and sees research in terms of falsification rather than verification (e.g. K. Popper) is not certain. The adherents of this view would no doubt be in broad agreement with the above quotation from Truth and Method. But Gadamer's critique of the "teleological" approach

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[2] WM 335; TM 316

to experience would probably include even these latter since although they emphasise the negative dimension of scientific research and reject traditional notions of induction, they too in the last resort are concerned with result rather than process, even if the result can never be more than provisional. Whereas the negativity stressed by the falsification approach to research may be seen as a matter of the faulty adjustment of our cognitive apparatus to reality "in itself", to "the facts", as a matter of an inevitable imprecision which characterizes human knowing,[3] for Gadamer the negativity of experience is not the mark of our failure to attain to reality, but is precisely the sign that we are encountering, that we are participating in, reality. Reality is for Gadamer not some "things-in-themselves", some really real "facts" to which human thought can merely approximate. For Gadamer reality is a dynamic process which involves human Understanding as an essential moment, and the negativity which characterizes the movement of human Understanding is not a matter of external adjustment but is that which enables this process to keep moving and developing.

This emphasis on the negative element in human Understanding as that which empowers the movement of reality itself brings Gadamer close to Hegel, and indeed it is in dialogue with Hegel's account of the negative or dialectical element in experience that Gadamer proceeds to work out his own concept of experience. What interests Gadamer in Hegel is the latter's insistence on the role of the negative in the road to science. The negation which Hegel sees as creative is not sheer negation which would fall away into nothingness,

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[3] cf. Bryan Magee's Popper (London: Fontana/Collins, 1973), pp.26ff.

but is the determinate negation which occurs when a specific concept fails to measure up to reality, or is "negated". However the reality that the concept fails to measure up to is not purely "in itself", but is always "in itself" for consciousness. The perfect adjustment or correspondence of subject and object which is the goal of science and towards which consciousness moves, according to Hegel, is not the adjustment of consciousness to some unchanging entity or entities "out there" to which consciousness approximates more and more nearly. Consciousness and the "in itself" are always for consciousness, are moments of consciousness, and the process of adjustment as well as the final perfect adjustment are always for consciousness. When consciousness is changed (or "reversed" as Hegel expresses it), the object, the "in itself", does not remain unchanged, but it too is altered:

> If the comparison shows that these two moments /knowledge and the object/ do not correspond to one another, it would seem that consciousness must alter its knowledge to make it conform to the object. But, in fact, in the alteration of the knowledge, the object itself alters for it too, for the knowledge that was present was essentially a knowledge of the object: as the knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it essentially belonged to this knowledge. Hence it comes to pass for consciousness that what it previously took to be the in-itself is not an in-itself, or that it was only an in-itself for consciousness. Since consciousness thus finds that its knowledge does not correspond to its object, the object itself does not stand the test . . . [4]

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[4] PS 54 (HW II 67), Hegel's italics.

This alteration of the object means that a new object, a new "in itself", arises, and this event is said by Hegel to be what we mean by experience:

> Inasmuch as the new true object arises from it, this dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object, is precisely what is called experience . . . This new object contains the nothingness of the first, it is what experience has made of it /er ist die über ihn gemachte Erfahrung/.[5]

What seems to attract Gadamer in all this is the presentation of experience as a dialectical process which moves through the power of the negative (i.e. it is the difference between the posited "in itself" and our concept of it at any given stage which impels towards a new concept with its correspondingly new "in itself"), and which is purely immanent (i.e. there is no transcendent "thing-in-itself" to which our consciousness merely approximates). We have already remarked on the Hegelian ring of Gadamer's presentation of his notion of the "fusion of horizons".[6] Where Gadamer would sharply differ from Hegel is over the latter's insistence that the movement of consciousness finally transcends the realm of experience, the realm of the experience of the difference between our concept and the object or "the other", into the realm of science, or Absolute Knowledge, where all difference is overcome and known to be overcome, where consciousness and the object are reconciled in and for consciousness. Presumably Gadamer would hold (though he does not explicitly say so) that Hegel too in the end falls victim to the "teleological" view of

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[5] PS 55 (HW II 67f), Hegel's italics,

[6] See Chapter 1(f) above.

experience in that, for all the importance he attaches to experience as the mode in which consciousness traverses the road to science, experience is nevertheless finally superseded when the goal is reached:

> Of course according to Hegel it is necessary that the road of the experience of consciousness should lead to a self-knowledge that no longer has anything different or alien to itself. For him, the perfection of experience is "science", the self-certainty of knowledge. Hence his criterion of experience is that of self-knowledge. That is why the dialectic of experience must end with the overcoming of all experience, which is attained in Absolute Knowledge i.e. in the complete identity of consciousness and object.[7]

Gadamer continues a few lines later:

> From the very beginning the nature of experience is conceived in terms of that which goes beyond experience. For experience itself can never be science. It stands in an absolute /unaufhebbar/ antithesis to knowledge and to that information which derives from theoretical or technical general knowledge. The truth of experience always contains an orientation towards new experience . . . The dialectic of experience has its own completion not in knowledge but in that openness for experience which is created /freigespielt/ by experience itself.[8]

In this last quotation it is difficult to say precisely at what point Gadamer stops expounding Hegel's position and starts expounding his own. This ambiguity is significant to the extent that it is not entirely clear whether it is Hegel (according to Gadamer) or Gadamer himself who is setting up experience in opposition to knowledge. Presumably it is Gadamer himself, since for Hegel no opposition would be "unaufhebbar". In which case we must wonder how this passage relates to those in which Gadamer wants to say that the human sciences, whose authentic mode of awareness is the hermeneutical

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[7] WM 337f; TM 318f

[8] WM 338; TM 319

experience, may legitimately claim that they are concerned with real knowledge. One can only suppose that Gadamer has been led to attribute or deny the status of knowledge to the hermeneutical experience depending on the context. Therefore the contradictions which arise could be said to be more apparent than real. Nevertheless there remains the suspicion that his polemic has led him to overstate his case at times and to attribute or deny the status of knowledge to the hermeneutical experience when what he really means is that the latter mediates another sort of knowledge. And these contradictions, though doubtless merely verbal, make it difficult to see clearly what precisely is the relation between this other sort of knowledge and what we ordinarily mean by knowledge.

At any rate it is clear in the passage under consideration that Gadamer wants to oppose experience to a certain sort of knowledge which he characterizes as "theoretical" and strongly resists any attempt to turn experience into a mere precursor or servant of knowledge. Experience is valuable for its own sake; indeed experience is the authentic mode of human Being. Experience belongs to the historical nature of man. (ibid.) And experience is essentially negative: "Thus the historical Being of human beings contains as an essential moment a fundamental negativity which comes to light in the essential relation between experience and insight". (ibid.) Thus Gadamer briefly introduces "insight" as a concept complementary to experience. Perhaps we are to find in the notion of insight Gadamer's way of talking of that mode of awareness proper to experience, a mode of awareness which on the one hand is in clear distinction to knowledge in the sense of science or theoretical knowledge, and on the other demands to be described as real knowledge.

But the notion of insight is mentioned rather than discussed. Gadamer says that insight always involves escaping from a state of dazzled, blinded, deluded captivity /ein Zurückkommen von etwas, worin man verblendeterweise befangen war/. To this extent he echoes Hegel's idea of experience as the movement whereby consciousness realizes that the other is not blankly other, but only other for it. Where Gadamer's notion of insight would sharply diverge from Hegel's account is that insight, unlike Hegel's experience, is never made redundant by the vanishing of all otherness, as in Hegel's Absolute Knowledge. For Gadamer insight is essentially insight into the limits of human knowledge. He refers to what he believes was Aeschylus' recognition of the metaphysical significance of the phrase "learning through suffering" (pathei mathos). According to Gadamer Aeschylus saw in this phrase the expression of the inner historicality of experience. (WM 339; TM 320) The phrase does not merely mean that we acquire a more correct view of things through a process of deception and subsequent undeception or disillusionment. Aeschylus, Gadamer believes, means more than this:

> He has in mind that which grounds this process. What man learns through suffering is not this or that, but is insight into the limits of human existence, insight into the insurmountability /Unaufhebbarkeit/ of the barrier that separates him from the divine. It is in the end a religious recognition, the recognition from which Greek tragedy was born.[9]

Insight then is that sort of knowledge against which reflexive philosophy will argue in vain. It is an awareness or knowledge of our limits, our finitude, an awareness which will not transcend these

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[9] WM 339; TM 320; cf. WM 126; TM 117

limits and that finitude by saying that after all these are only "for us". It is awareness of a fundamental and insurmountable negativity which characterizes human existence and which grounds all the particular negations we experience.

Whatever may be the precise relation of insight to experience (and it is perhaps unwise to push Gadamer's distinction here too far), for Gadamer it is in experience that man attains to an authentic awareness of reality and of his own nature. This is no fusion of reality and human nature in infinite knowledge. Experience is experience of human finitude (ibid.) and historicality (WM 340; TM 321). And yet as we saw above, experience has its own sort of completeness. In the experienced man, Gadamer says, the truth-value of experience finds its completion. (WM 339; TM 320) This completion of experience does not involve a passing beyond experience; rather it is an openness to ever new experiences. The consummation of experience involves the renunciation of all claims to possess final knowledge; it is the end of all dogmatism:

> If it is already characteristic of every phase of the process of experience that the experienced person acquires a new openness to new experiences, this is above all true of the idea of complete experience. In it experience is not at an end and a new form of knowledge attained (Hegel), but in it experience is for the first time wholly and authentically present. In it all dogmatism, which proceeds from the soaring desires of the human heart, reaches an absolute barrier. Experience teaches us to recognize reality. What is properly gained from all experience, then, is to know what is. But "what is" is here not this or that, but that "which no longer can be overthrown" /was nicht mehr umzustossen ist/ (Ranke).[10]

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[10] WM 339f; TM 320

Gadamer will go on to analyse the hermeneutical experience in terms of the specific form of experience we call the "I-Thou" experience. But before moving on to that, it is worth staying a little longer with his analysis of experience since it is on his own admission fundamental to his over-all position, as he writes in the Foreword to the second edition of Truth and Method: "The chapter on experience assumes a key and a systematic position in my investigations". (WM xxi; TM xxiii) It is with his concept of experience that Gadamer takes his stand against the claims of reflexive philosophy. But far from espousing any sort of "empiricism" in the ordinary sense of the word, or any form of positivism, Gadamer gives a critique of the traditional concept of experience in philosophies orientated (consciously or unconsciously) towards the natural sciences. His critique of the "teleological" concept of experience embraces even the assumptions of non-scientific everyday man. In contrast to this concept Gadamer attempts to work out his own concept of experience in dialogue with Hegel in whom he finds a true understanding of experience as historical, negative and dialectical, though according to Gadamer Hegel too in the end succumbs to the "teleological" account of experience in that he attempts to transcend experience into Absolute Knowledge. It is important to bear in mind both the immediate and the over-all context in which Gadamer attempts to work out his concept of experience. In the immediate context he is concerned to resist the lure of reflexive philosophy and this he does by stressing the unsurmountable historicality and negativity of experience in contrast to all perfected knowledge. But the over-all aim of Truth and Method is to secure

for the hermeneutical experience the status of knowledge and truth. The problems raised by this double intention are focussed here in the question of how he can stress the historical and negative aspects of experience as opposed to any "Aufhebung" into perfect knowledge without forfeiting the claim to knowledge and truth which he wants to make for the hermeneutical experience. If he avoids the Charybdis of reflexivity, can he evade the Scylla of historical relativism and scepticism? And if he escapes Scylla, can he evade Charybdis?

Ultimately the "universal" which Gadamer believes can allow him to escape reflexivity without falling into scepticism is language itself, or more accurately, "the centre of language". To what extent this confidence is justified is a question which must be postponed until our discussion of language. For the moment it is interesting to observe how Gadamer wants to argue for a form of completeness or perfection of experience. He resists the "teleological" completion of experience (even in principle) by its "Aufhebung" into knowledge, yet he is unwilling to accept the apparent consequence that experience is thereby reduced to an aimless succession of meaningless events. Experience is not to be viewed "teleologically", but it is not therefore aimless; the end of experience is experience itself. Experience is not directed towards knowledge, but it is not therefore directionless; rather it is self-directed. It is almost as if reflexivity, which was solemnly kicked out of the front door, has sneaked, heavily disguised, in the back door again. For as Gadamer emphatically tells us, the ultimate object of experience is not this or that, but experience itself, experience as such, authentic or true experience.

But this has at least a structural similarity to the contention that the ultimate object of thought is not this or that, but thought itself; the end of thought is self-thinking thought. Perhaps we might say that for Gadamer the end of experience is self-experiencing experience. And as so often with the orthodox forms of reflexivity, Gadamer's quasi-reflexivity (if we may so call it) is said to be essentially a religious insight. This reading of Gadamer's notion of the completion of experience may perhaps seem a little strained, but that it is not purely arbitrary is shown by the way in which traditional motifs of speculative or reflexive philosophy tend to re-appear in Gadamer's philosophy in a modified form. Gadamer's idea of language is, as we shall see, essentially a re-working of the idea of the concrete universal; language is said to be in some sense "speculative", it is "infinite in a finite way"; an important place is reserved for terms like "reason", "Aufhebung", "mediation", "negativity", and "dialectic". This is not the place to attempt to assess the significance of this aspect of Gadamer's philosophy. But these examples do seem to lend some support to our contention that the way experience seems to bend back on itself in Gadamer's treatment is at least analogous to the typical movement of reflexive philosophy.

Another way of expressing this analogy between reflexive philosophy and Gadamer's treatment of experience is to say that, while Gadamer insists on the finitude and historicality of experience, for him ultimately experience does not consist in a series of particular experiences, but culminates in the experience of the structure of experience. "Finitude" and "historicality" are not merely expressions of philosophical and historical agnosticism or scepticism;

they define the structure of experience, the basic mode of human Being and awareness. Our experiences seem to consist for Gadamer in the development towards an awareness of the structure of experience, that is, historicality and finitude. He says: "experience is the experience of human finitude" (WM 339; TM 320), and "true experience is that of one's own historicality" (WM 340; TM 321). This is to say that the content of experience is ultimately the form of experience, and this seems to invite comparison with the claim of reflexive philosophy to unify the form and content of thought in the Absolute. The important difference of Gadamer from reflexive philosophy, or at least from Hegel's version of it, would be that the latter attempts to work through the content of thought, showing how the content of thought develops into the form of thought (and vice versa) in Absolute Knowledge. The question as to the success of Hegel's attempt (specifically in the Phenomenology of Spirit) is beyond the scope of this study, but what is important for our present purposes is his intention rather than his success or failure. For there does not seem to be in Truth and Method an analogous attempt to show how the content of experience comes to be the form of experience. It may be via "a religious insight" (WM 339; TM 320), but that seems to evade the philosophical task and sounds suspiciously like what Hegel called in the Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit "the rapturous enthusiasm which, like a shot from a pistol, begins straight away with Absolute Knowledge."[11] Of course Gadamer is not claiming Absolute Knowledge in Hegel's sense, indeed he

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[11] PS 16 (HW II 21)

wants to deny that this is a human possibility; but he does seem to make claims for his account of the structure of experience that can only be described as absolute. Irrespective of the success or failure of his own attempt, Hegel's demand that absolute philosophical claims should be philosophically justified seems a compelling one. The acknowledgement of this demand from Hegel need not entail the refusal to accept the profound truth contained in the religious insight in question, or indeed in any other. Hegel himself would have been the last to deny the truth of religious insight. The objection is to the appeal to religious insight at a crucial stage in a philosophical argument without any clear statement of how religious and philosophical truth relate to each other. Whether or not we accept Hegel's version of the relation between religious and philosophical truth, the task of making that relation as clear and explicit as possible seems ineluctable. What this task would entail in the case of Gadamer's philosophy will be the concern of Part Two of this study.

Gadamer's failure to show clearly how the content of experience develops into, or is even related to, the form of experience, how what we experience becomes, according to Gadamer, the awareness that experience itself is the end of experience and that we must always be open for new experience, is linked to similar obscurities attaching to Gadamer's notion of truth. The emphasis on truth as event, as disclosure, tends to suggest that for Gadamer truth is to be located in the "thatness", the "eventual" nature, of truth. The event of Understanding is the event of truth by virtue of its happening. For all Gadamer's insistance on the "Sachlichkeit", the "objectivity", of truth in contrast to the psychologizing tendencies of romantic hermeneutics, it is difficult to see how the material

(ontic) content of truth is ultimately related to formal or structural (ontological) event of truth. Truth as disclosive event seems hard to bring into connection with any view of truth as the elaboration of the content of Understanding. The question of how truth thus seen in formal (ontological) terms can be related to any sort of determinate content will be taken up later.[12] For the moment we may note that Gadamer's rejection of the "teleological" approach to experience seems to involve him in a position where the value of experience (which Gadamer wants to maintain) resides solely in its formal aspect and the connection of this formal aspect with any sort of content becomes exceedingly tenuous. Whether this tenuousness is irremediable, and in particular whether Gadamer's brief appeal to religious insight[13] could be expanded so as to strengthen this connection will be discussed in Part Two.

It is perhaps worth remarking in conclusion that this question of the relation of the formal definition of experience to the actual contents of experience recalls in some ways the question raised at the end of the section on Gadamer's concept of Understanding, where we asked how the formal account of Understanding relates to the actual process of Understanding. Could the process of Understanding be said to be fully realized apart from knowledge of the nature of Understanding? A similar questions may be asked of Gadamer's account of experience. Gadamer wants to talk of the fruit of our experiences as "true experience" which is insight into the true nature of all

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[12] See Chapter 7 below.

[13] See also KS I 68; PH 80; see also Part Two, Chapter 1 below.

experiences. Is it not the case that only from the vantage point of "true experience" we can see what is the real meaning of our experiences? Apart from this insight are not our "experiences" merely brute contingencies that befall us? Strictly speaking, do we not have to have attained to "true experience" in order to have experiences as experiences rather than as a round of meaningless suffering The question as to how we attain to this "true experience" is therefore not merely academic but is profoundly existentiell. And at this point Gadamer leaves us most in the dark. He may reject the serene confidence with which Hegel's "Science of the experience of consciousness"[14] beholds the necessity of the development of experience towards that Science, a Science which goes behind the back of actual experience[15] and from the realm of light watches experience grope painfully in the darkness towards the light. Yet if Gadamer rejects Hegel's sunlight, his notion of "true experience" is nevertheless a sort of light, albeit an austere one. His attempt to retrieve the truth of "the metaphysics of light" in the last chapter of Truth and Method[16] indirectly confirms this. For Gadamer wants to reject the idea that human experience is a mere blind groping in the total darkness of scepticism, as well as to reject the sunlight of Absolute Knowledge. Gadamer may be right in rejecting this all-too-brilliant sunlight; but the superiority of Hegel over Gadamer is that the former attempts to show how human experience with extreme

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[14] PS 56 (HW II 69)

[15] ibid.

[16] See Chapter 9(c) below.

difficulty moves towards and finally reaches that light. Gadamer gives little to show why the way of the cross should be the way to truth rather than being senseless suffering; or why through suffering we should learn.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE I-THOU EXPERIENCE AND THE HERMENEUTICAL EXPERIENCE

If, as Gadamer hopes, the devaluation of experience by the "teleological" approach in general, and by reflexive philosophy in particular, has been decisively overcome with the revised concept of experience, it remains for him to specify the consequences of this new concept of experience for the hermeneutical experience. For Gadamer the hermeneutical experience is best understood in terms of the "I-Thou" experience. The distinguishing feature of this form of experience in comparison with the more general one we have been dealing with hitherto is that the former involves persons rather than mere objects. (WM 340; TM 321) It is thus a moral phenomenon. (ibid.) In the hermeneutical experience we have to do not with a mere process which we get to know and learn how to master through experience; we have to do with tradition which, as language, speaks to us as a Thou. (ibid.) This should not be taken to mean that the text is the expression of a Thou, which would be to return to the psychologizing tendencies of romantic hermeneutics which Gadamer is trying to overcome. The text itself is a Thou, detached from any Thou which lies behind the text, and its meaning is what encounters us as a Thou. (ibid.) Obviously there is some difficulty involved in the idea that the text addresses us in the same way as a person, a difficulty which Gadamer admits and tries to clarify later.[1]

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[1] See WM 359f; TM 340f

Moreover it is not entirely clear what is involved in this attempt to play off the I-Thou experience against the experience which learns to master natural processes. It is unlikely that Gadamer would want to contrast our experience of persons too sharply with our experience of the natural world, since this would be to risk falling into a sort of dualism not too dissimilar to that of which he accuses Dilthey. As we see elsewhere,[2] Gadamer wants to re-think our relation to the natural world, and to emphasize our continuity rather than our discontinuity with it. What exactly Gadamer's critique of the "teleological" approach to experience and his revised concept of experience would mean in terms of any sort of philosophy of nature is not touched on here. But it is probably safe to conclude that the difference he makes between the experience of natural processes and the experience of persons is intended as one of degree rather than of kind.

Gadamer outlines three different kinds of I-Thou experience and the kinds of hermeneutical experience that correspond to them. Both of these (i.e. the I-Thou experience and its corresponding kind of hermeneutical experience) correspond to one of the approaches to experience which Gadamer has treated in his general account of experience. There is a kind of I-Thou experience and a kind of hermeneutical experience which correspond (a) to the understanding of experience operative in the natural sciences; and (b) to the reflexive (or Hegelian) account of experience; and finally (c) to Gadamer's own revised concept of experience. Thus we have an ascent

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[2] See WM 100; TM 94 and KS III 217f; PH 236f. See also Part Two, Chapter 5(a) below.

from the distorted I-Thou experience and the correspondingly distorted hermeneutical experience which are based on the understanding of experience in the natural sciences, through the perhaps less distorted forms of experience on the reflexive level, to the true I-Thou experience and the true hermeneutical experience on the level of Gadamer's account of the true nature of experience.

(a) (i) The kind of I-Thou experience which corresponds to the understanding of experience in the natural sciences is one which "seeks to discover things that are typical in the behaviour of one's fellow men and is able to make predictions concerning another person on the basis of experience. We call this a knowledge of human nature". (WM 341; TM 322) (The question whether this is the only way to relate to the natural world is one which Gadamer does not raise here.)

(ii) The hermeneutical relation which corresponds to this I-Thou relation is that of "the naïve faith in method and in the objectivity which can be attained through it". (ibid.) By methodologically excluding all "subjective" elements in an effort to obtain "objective" knowledge, such an approach merely succeeds in cutting itself off from the continuing action of tradition in which alone it has its historical reality. (ibid.) This, according to Gadamer, is the method of the social sciences, which follows the methodological ideas of the eighteenth century and their programmatic formulation by Hume, in conscious imitation of the methods of the natural sciences. (ibid.) The effect is that "the nature of the hermeneutical experience is thus flattened out in exactly the same way as we have seen in the 'teleological' interpretation of the concept of induction since Aristotle". (ibid.)

(b) (i) The I-Thou relation on the level of reflexive thought is superior to the previous approach in that the person is recognized as a person. But the movement of reflexivity does not allow the other to remain other, to remain in a state of sheer immediacy. (ibid.) This dialectical movement (which for Gadamer is an illusion /ein dialektischer Schein/) destroys the reciprocity of the I-Thou relation and turns it into a form of self-relation /Ichbezogenheit/. (ibid.) Each partner in the relation tries reflexively to outdo the other. (ibid.) He or she claims to know already the claim the other makes, indeed to understand the other better than the latter does him - or herself. "Thus the Thou loses the immediacy with which it makes its claim. It /the Thou/ is understood, but in the sense that it is anticipated and reflexively intercepted from the standpoint of the other /the I/". (WM 341f; TM 322) Gadamer relates this to Hegel's description in the Phenomenology of Spirit of the changing forms which the struggle for mutual recognition takes, the struggle in which "I" needs another "I" in order to be an "I", and the other has to be a person in order to be the means to the end of my own personhood. Not that the struggling individuals are always consciously aware of the struggle that is going on; as Hegel says in the Introduction to Phenomenology of Spirit,[1] the phenomenologist goes behind the back of the participants in the struggle towards self-recognition. In whatever way what Gadamer says here may relate to the complex development of the struggle for mutual recognition which Hegel describes

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1 PS 56 (HW II 69).

in the Phenomenology of Spirit,[2] Gadamer wants to point to a danger of the reflexive relation the recognition of which is of central importance to his own philosophical enterprise. This is the danger of reflecting oneself out of the mutuality or reciprocity of the I-Thou relation:

> In fact, his /the servant in the master-servant relation/ own self-consciousness consists precisely in his withdrawing from the dialectic of this reciprocity, in his reflecting himself out of his relation to the other and so becoming unreachable by him. By understanding the other, by claiming to know him, one takes from him all justification of his own claims. In particular the dialectic of all "caring" /Fürsorge/ operates in this way, permeating all human relationships as a reflected form of the desire for mastery. The claim to understand the other in advance actually performs the function of keeping the claim of the other at a distance.[3]

(ii) What corresponds to this reflexive I-Thou relation in the sphere of hermeneutics is the so-called historical consciousness, which claims to recognize the otherness of the historical other. The past is seen not as a field in which general laws can be discovered by induction, but rather, it is claimed, the past is recognized in all its historical uniqueness. But as in the reflexive I-Thou relation, the historical consciousness reflects itself out of the reciprocity of its relation to the historical other. In the end it forgets its own historicality (its own "otherness" as Gadamer puts it elsewhere) and claims to know the other better than the other knows itself. "By claiming to transcend completely its own

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[2] It is perhaps worth recalling that for Hegel the participants in the struggle are reconciled in the realm of the Religious Consciousness where mutual and self-recognition are first realized.

[3] WM 342; TM 323

conditionedness by its recognition of this /the historical uniqueness of the other/, it is however caught in a dialectical illusion, since in reality it is as it were trying to master the past" (ibid.) The historical consciousness does not have to boast of a full-blown philosophy of history in the manner of Hegel to fall into this trap. The ideal of perfect enlightenment which, according to Gadamer, guides for instance Dilthey is just as much a dialectical illusion. (WM 343; TM 323f) To imagine that we can free ourselves of prejudices (i.e. reflect ourselves out of our historical conditionedness) does not prevent our prejudices from operating all the same. Moreover, we thereby fail to learn what recognition of our own prejudices, of our own conditionedness, would allow us to learn:

> Whoever imagines that he is free of prejudices, basing this confidence on the objectivity of his procedures and denying his own historical conditionedness, experiences the power of the prejudices which unconsciously dominate him . . . Whoever does not accept that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what shows itself in their light. It is like what happens in the I-Thou relation. Whoever reflects himself out of the mutuality of such a relation alters this relation and destroys its moral bond. In exactly the same way whoever reflects himself out of the living relation to tradition destroys the real meaning of this tradition.[4]

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[4] WM 343; TM 324, Gadamer's italics.

(c) (i) The I-Thou relation that corresponds to Gadamer's own understanding of "true experience" is characterized by openness. Openness means that I do not reflect myself out of the mutuality of the I-Thou relation, I do not explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously, claim to know the other better than the latter knows him - or herself. Rather I allow the other to make a claim on me, I listen to him or her, I let him or her tell me something. But this openness is more than simply a matter of letting oneself be told something by someone, of listening to someone; listening to someone and indeed any human relationship or community whatsoever, presupposes this openness:

> In human relationships the important thing, as we have seen, is really to experience the Thou as a Thou, i.e. not to overlook his claim and to allow oneself to be told something by him. This constitutes openness. But this openness exists ultimately not only for the person to whom one listens; whoever allows himself to be told anything at all is open in a fundamental way. Without such mutual openness there are no genuine human bonds. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another /Zueinander gehören heisst immer zugleich Auf-ein-ander-Hörenkönnen/.[1]

Openness, then, is the prior condition of Understanding. It is, at least ideally or formally, openness for anything, even for what we do not want to hear: "Openness to the other then includes the acknowledgement that I must accept as valid that which goes against me, even when there is no one to enforce its validity. (ibid.)

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[1] ibid.

(ii) It is not difficult to translate this idea of openness into terms of hermeneutics. Gadamer writes:

> I must acknowledge the validity of the claim made by tradition, not merely in the sense of acknowledging the otherness of the past, but in such a way that it may tell me something. This too demands a fundamental sort of openness. Whoever is open to tradition in this way perceives that the historical consciousness is not really open at all but . . . has already flattened out tradition in advance and in a fundamental way. Thus the criteria of its own knowing can never be put in question by tradition.[2]

The ideal of hermeneutics must be the ability to listen to what tradition tells us, to remain open to the truth it mediates to us. This openness is in the end the same as the "true experience" which Gadamer sketched out a few pages above:

> The hermeneutical consciousness has its fulfilment not in its methodological self-certainty, but in the same readiness for experience which distinguishes the experienced person from the person captivated by dogma. This is what distinguishes effective-historical consciousness, as we are now in a position to say more exactly from the perspective of the concept of experience.[3]

Gadamer will further analyse the concept of openness (and that of experience) in terms of the question. Before following him we might pause to ask what are the implications of the questions we raised in connection with Gadamer's general analysis of experience for the extension of that analysis into the realm of the I-Thou relation and the realm of hermeneutics. The obvious question is how this "openness", which is the same as "true experience", relates to actual human relationships and to the actual interpretation of

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[2] WM 343f; TM 324f

[3] WM 344; TM 325

texts. This question has two aspects to it. First of all, there is the formal or philosophical aspect. This is concerned with how the formal account of the structure of openness is reached and justified. How does Gadamer get from what we might describe as "inauthentic" modes of I-Thou and hermeneutical experience to his own concept of openness? This is a formal question which must be asked however attractive we may find Gadamer's concept of openness. It is really the same question as the one about the philosophical justification of Gadamer's revised concept of experience in general. Is there some access to this openness which is prior to its formal expression, some so to speak pre-thematic awareness of openness on which Gadamer can base his formal account? Such an awareness would be analogous not only to Heidegger's "pre-ontological" grasp of Being, but also perhaps to Hegel's grounding of his formal account of knowing and Being in the experience of consciousness in general and in the Vorstellungen of religious consciousness in particular. We see something similar to this in Gadamer's notion of "true experience" which was said to be essentially a religious insight. But Gadamer does not deal explicitly with this question.

The second, more existentiell aspect of the question is this: given the validity of Gadamer's account of experience, how do <u>we</u>, as participants in human relationships and as interpreters of texts, get from "inauthentic" modes of experience to that openness which is the authentic human mode of Being, which is the true dwelling-place for human beings? This openness is, according to Gadamer, both the prior condition of human relationships and the interpretation of texts as well as the ideal to be achieved by these activities.

However the question is not so much whether it is possible to speak both of prior condition and ideal term; one is tempted to call the "become what thou art" motif perennial. It is not so much what we are as how we become it that present problems here. As we have seen, Gadamer gives a sort of typology of the forms of experience which is convincing as an account of the various modes of experience. We recognize the descriptions as accurate. The problem is how these descriptions relate to each other. They are convincing as isolated snap-shots; but we miss the sort of motion picture that we find, for example in the Phenomenology of Spirit. There is nothing to account for the movement, so characteristic of life, between these modes of experience, whether that movement be one of "falling" from openness to manipulation and dogmatism, or one of "ascent" to the openness which alone is authentically human. To say that the "ascent" is really a "return", that the step forward is really a "step back" (i.e. for Gadamer to say that he is not recommending some new hermeneutical procedure but is rather uncovering what precedes and grounds all hermeneutical endeavour) does not really answer the question about the movement itself. To say that we already are what we must become does not answer the question about the becoming. That question is how we see the true nature of Understanding and experience as openness and know that we see; and how, having seen, we reach and, so to speak, inhabit that region of openness. Unless there is some attempt to answer that question Gadamer's concept of openness runs the risk of being dangerously abstract and lacking in any connection with the concrete problems of human relationships and of historical and cross-cultural Understanding.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LOGIC OF QUESTION AND ANSWER

Gadamer attempts to clarify further his notion of openness by examining its "logical structure" in terms of the concept of the question. (WM 344-351; TM 325 333) He will then proceed to show the application of this "logic of question and answer" in the realm of hermeneutics. (WM 351-360; TM 333-341) This latter section is the completion of his attempt to describe (and/or prescribe?) the process of Understanding operative in the human sciences, and is largely a dialogue with Collingwood. However it is the previous section on the logical structure of openness (entitled "The model of the Platonic dialectic") that is of particular importance for our understanding of the foundations of Gadamer's philosophical enterprise. For the very phrase "the logical structure of openness" (WM 344; TM 325) carries within itself the tensions which lie at the heart of Gadamer's position. For, as we hope to show, the concept of openness ultimately belongs to the realm of ontology, and it is precisely the relation of ontology and logic that is so problematic in Gadamer. One way of describing the over-all intention of Truth and Method is to say that Gadamer is attempting to carry over into the realm of logic the ontological insights of Heidegger (hence Gadamer's running dialogue - explicit and implicit - with both Hegel and Heidegger). The problem is that Heidegger's concern was to get behind logic.[1] How

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[1] see W Met 37; EB 342

such ontological enquiry relates to the logical level (or how the question of Being is related to questions about particular beings) is the point at issue. It is this transition from ontology to logic that is the "hidden agenda" of Truth and Method. Paul Ricoeur in his essay "The Task of Hermeneutics"[2] says this in slightly different terms (the "epistemology" in question is that of the human sciences, and hence is the same as the "logic" with which Gadamer is concerned in his projected "logic of question and answer"):

> The concern to ground the /hermeneutical/ circle more deeply than any epistemology can prevents Heidegger from repeating the epistemological question after the ontology . . . . This aporia becomes the central problem of the hermeneutical philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer in Truth and Method. This Heidelberg philosopher proposes to take up again the question of the human sciences by means of the Heideggerian ontology . . . [3]

Explicit concern with ontology does not come to the fore until the third part of Truth and Method (entitled "The Ontological Turn of Hermeneutics guided by Language") and it is with his concept of language that Gadamer attempts to hold together ontology and logic, as we shall see in the following chapters. However the section on the "logical structure of openness" repays careful attention as it unconsciously reveals the dimensions of the problem Gadamer faces, of the chasm he is trying to bridge. For ultimately the difference between ontology and logic that Gadamer is trying to overcome is nothing less than Heidegger's "ontological difference".

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[2] Heidegger and Modern Philosophy, ed. M. Murray, pp.141-160.

[3] M. Murray (ed). op.cit., pp.156f.

There is a seemingly natural connection between Gadamer's analysis of experience and the concepts of openness and of the question. "The openness that is part of experience is, from a logical point of view, precisely the openness of being this or that. It has the structure of a question": (WM 344; TM 325) That the structure of the question is presupposed in all experience is obvious, Gadamer thinks. (ibid.) He is concerned to stress what he calls "the priority of the question". This priority was recognised by plato, Gadamer claims (WM 345; TM 326), which explains the title of this section ("The model of the Platonic dialectic"). Perhaps the best way of seeing what Gadamer means by "the priority of the question" is to see the relation between question and answer as analogous to the relation between experience and knowledge as Gadamer understands this latter relation. Although Gadamer himself does not put it in these terms, we might say that just as he strove to overcome the "teleological" subordination of experience to knowledge, so he wants to overcome the "teleological" subordination of question to answer. In fact in this latter case we should really speak of the "teleological" subordination of the question to the <u>state ment</u>, since here the question is merely a means to the further determination of the statement. Where priority lies with the answer, the answer is not really an answer at all, since on Gadamer's argument no real question has been asked. When the question is merely instrumental to the unfolding of the implication of the statement, when it is a means of developing the knowledge we think we already have implicitly, then for Gadamer there can be no real questions. In Gadamer's view the great merit of Plato is to have exposed the hollowness of the pseudo-questions of Socrates' opponents, for whom the question is merely a method of displaying what they think they already know. Socrates in contrast

knows that to ask real questions we have to know that we don't know (the Socratic docta ignorantia). In Gadamer's terms, real questions presuppose an openness. Without this openness there are no real questions and no real answers. In this latter case questions are methods, techniques for the development of what we think we already know; answers are the setting forth, the elaboration, the display, of our supposed knowledge. Like Plato (at least in Gadamer's reading), Gadamer insists on the priority of the question which alone allows real answers and mediates real knowledge.[4] And like Collingwood, he wants to free logic from the hegemony of the statement.[5] Understanding is properly concerned not with statements but with answers. To understand something is to understand it as an answer to a question. The so-called statement is really an answer, and is to be understood in the context of a question, rather than the question being understood in the context of the "answer", that is, knowledge which we think we already possess and which we merely explicate or develop by means of the question.

Just as Gadamer rejected any knowledge that got beyond, that transcended, "mere" experience, so he is suspicious of statements that have become detached from a context of real questioning. We see this, for example, in his critique of the sort of academic philosophy which treats the history of philosophy as a series of

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[4] In fact, as we shall discuss below, the "priority of the question" in Plato is perhaps less radical than Gadamer seems to think. One is tempted to think of Socrates' questions as maieutic instruments and as the emergence of an answer as the birth of implicit knowledge. Socrates" "docta ignorantia" should not be taken too literally, for after all in Plato's view we do already know the answer, only we have "forgotten" it. Socrates' attacks on pseudo-knowledge do not imply a denial that we already posses (implicitly) real knowledge.

[5] See Collingwood's An Autobiography, reprinted with a new introduction by Stephen Toulmin (Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 29-43.

attempts to solve a certain number of timeless, unchanging problems which are detached from any genuine philosophical questioning.[6] Another example is his comments on legal procedures which deal with statements which are torn from the living context of conversation, of real question and answer. (WM 444; TM 426) Gadamer claims to follow Plato in a general suspicion of the written word since it is all-too-open to "dogmatic abuse". (WM 350f; TM 332) He believes that the attempt to keep philosophy in the living context of conversation by means of the dialogue form provides a model for his own attempt to ground hermeneutics in conversation, in a dialectic of question and answer in which the question has priority. The analogy between Gadamer's re-thinking of the relation between experience and knowledge and his re-thinking of the relation between question and answer (statement) emerges when he writes:

> And just as the dialectical negativity of experience found its fulfilment in the idea of a perfect experience, in which we become aware of our absolute finitude and limited being, the logical form of the question, and the negativity that is part of it, find their fulfilment in a radical negativity: the knowledge of not knowing. This is the famous Socratic docta ignorantia which opens up the way, amid the most extreme negativity of doubt, to the true superiority of questioning.[7]

The superiority or priority of the question corresponds then to what we might call Gadamer's attempt to establish the priority of experience in relation to knowledge. But just as there were some difficulties

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[6] Gadamer thinks that his critique of the German Neo-Kantians in this regard parallels Collingwood's critique of the approach of the "Oxford realists" to the history of philosophy; see WM 357-9; TM 338-40. cf. Collingwood, op.cit., pp.60ff.

[7] WM 344f; TM 325f.

attaching to Gadamer's concept of experience and its rather uneasy hovering between scepticism and knowledge, so there are ambiguities surrounding his idea of the priority of the question. Clearly the "radical negativity" of Gadamer's version of docta ignorantia should not be taken to be sheer scepticism. On the other hand, Gadamer wants to reject the "teleological" subordination of question to "answer" (i.e. knowledge in the form of statements). It is interesting that according to Gadamer the fulfilment of the question should be in the knowledge of not knowing, for here we may perhaps glimpse a kind of reflexivity similar to that which we detected in Gadamer's idea of "true experience". Indeed one might wonder whether Gadamer might not have expressed the fulfilment of the question as the question of the question, where questioning is bent back on itself. In this case questioning as such would be the object of questioning. One might speculate as to why in fact Gadamer does not push the priority of the question to this apparently inevitable conclusion, but defines the fulfilment of the question in terms of knowledge, that is, as the knowledge of not knowing. Is this not in the end to understand the question in terms of the answer, even if in terms of the initial absence of any answer? The question as the presupposition of knowledge (or of the answer) is defined as knowledge of our initial lack of knowledge; but this definition itself presupposes knowledge. Gadamer's definition of the question seems to remain obstinately in the realm of the answer, of knowledge. It is perhaps possible to detect here a reluctance to follow the priority of the question to its ultimate conclusions, for in the end the question is seen in terms of the answer (or lack of it) rather than the answer being grounded rigorously in the question.

This reluctance which we have claimed to detect is in fact of considerable significance because it is connected with the problem of the relation of logic and ontology in Gadamer which was mentioned above. For if we follow the priority of the question to its ultimate conclusions, we move out of logic altogether and into ontology, at least in the Heideggerian sense of that term. To define the question ultimately as the knowledge of not knowing, as absolute lack of knowledge is (at least in one of understanding the phrase) in some sense to remain in the sphere of logic. By "the sphere of logic" we mean here the realm of determinate knowledge, or, in scholastic terms, the realm of essence. The background to our use of the word "logic" is not modern Anglo-Saxon philosophy but Greek, scholastic and Hegelian thought (which form, after all, the context in which Gadamer is thinking). Gadamer, then, defines the fulfilment of the question as the knowledge of our initial lack of determinate knowledge; but this is nevertheless to remain in the realm of determinate knowledge, of essence, and of logic.

However to follow the priority of the question to its ultimate conclusion is, as we have suggested, to question questioning as such. This is not so much to adopt an extreme scepticism (which arguably remains fixed in the sphere of determinate knowledge by its very denial of the possibility of any such knowledge), as to move into the realm of Heideggerian ontology, whose aim is to get <u>behind</u> the realm of logic and to ask the question of Being as such. This question can be formulated precisely as the question of questioning as such, as in Heidegger's <u>Introduction to Metaphysics</u> where

Heidegger talks of the recoil of the question "why?" upon itself, when we dare to ask "why the why?"[8] Moreover E. Coreth attempts to ground his Metaphysics (which is heavily indebted to Heidegger's ontological enquiries) in the question of questioning as such.[9] The priority of the question which Gadamer advocates would seem to lead in the end to the ontological realm, the return from which into the logical realm (i.e. the realm of determinate knowledge of this or that) is, as we have suggested above, highly problematic. And yet Gadamer wants to found a logic of question and answer on the priority of the question.

We might also express this ambiguity in terms of the relation between the notions of openness and determination. On the one hand, as we saw above, openness is a key concept for Gadamer. Openness is the prior condition of authentic Understanding; openness is what allows the process of Understanding to take place. There is clearly a tendency here to see openness as the ontological ground of Understanding, as that space or clearing which lets Understanding be at all. But difficulties begin to emerge when Gadamer undertakes to plot the logical structure of openness. For he seems to see the hermeneutical logic he is seeking as some sort of dialectic of openness and determination, as a dialectic of question (which opens up the Being of something) and answer (which determines the Being of something). We read for example that "the emergence of the question opens up, as it were, the Being of what is asked about.

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8 Introduction to Metaphysics, p.5; see also W Met 41; EB 348.

9 See E. Coreth, Metaphysics, trans. and edited by J. Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), pp.45-68.

Hence the logos which explicates this opened-up Being is already an answer. (WM 345; TM 326) However this dialectic of openness and determination is problematic, because the openness which is really ontological, that is, the openness which allows Understanding to take place, which allows anything to be at all, must be distinguished from the determinate openness to be this or that. What we might call "ontological openness" would be absolutely prior to any sort of determination. How such "ontological openness" and logical determination can be brought together in some sort of dialectic is not at all clear, for the difference between them is nothing less than Heidegger's "ontological difference". Such a dialectic would have to be explicitly argued for, or at least discussed; however Gadamer seems merely to assume what it is really his business to demonstrate.[10]

There is, however, a sense in which Gadamer may legitimately combine openness and determination, but only at the cost of openness ceasing to be "ontological openness" and becoming what we might call "logical openness"; that is, instead of being sheer openness it becomes a determinate or specific openness, not openness absolutely prior to any determination, but openness for this or that. And Gadamer indeed dismisses sheer openness as of no significance, and insists that what counts is determinate openness:

> The openness of the question is not boundless. It is limited by the horizon of the question. A question which lacks this loses itself in emptiness /geht ins Leere/. It becomes a question only when the fluid indeterminacy of the direction in which it is pointing is overcome by a specific alternative being presented. In other words, the question has to be asked. The asking of it implies openness, but also limitation.[11]

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[10] We seem here to be drifting into the vicinity of Thomist thought. However it is beyond our present scope and competence to follow up this line of enquiry.

[11] WM 346; TM 327

This dismissal of sheer openness offers an interesting parallel to Hegel's dismissal of sheer negation or nothingness.[12] For Hegel only determinate negation is of interest, since from the logical point of view sheer negation is an empty abstraction - as is of course Being, which is indistinguishable from sheer Nothingness. From a logical point of view it makes sense for Gadamer to dismiss sheer openness, since only determinate openness is of any logical interest. Absolutely undetermined openness is as much an empty abstraction as Hegel's Being and Nothingness. But from the point of view of Heideggerian ontology (on which after all Gadamer claims to base his enterprise) such relegation of Being and Nothingness to the status of empty abstractions is precisely "forgetfulness of Being": it is to remain trapped in the realm of logic, of essence, of determinate beings. The whole thrust of Heidegger's thought is to probe Being and Nothingness, not as empty logical abstractions, but as that which is prior to, which grounds, the whole realm of logic, of essence, of determinate beings.

Gadamer's proposed dialectic of openness (question) and determination (answer) is perfectly possible as a logical structure grounding hermeneutics just as long as it is clearly recognized that Gadamer is remaining on the level of logic. In this case his logic of question and answer is really some sort of modification of the Hegelian dialectic. That this is indeed the case is suggested by the fact that what Gadamer seems here to object to in Hegel is that the latter tries, as it were, to go it alone. It is not Hegel's dialectical project as such, not the fact that Hegel remains on the level of logic (i.e. forgets Being), that Gadamer seems to object to here, but rather that Hegel thought he could in some way complete the dialectic himself:

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[12] e.g. PS 51 (HW II 63)

> To elaborate the totality of the determination of thought, the aim of Hegel's logic, is the attempt to enclose within the great monologue of modern "method" the continuum of meaning which is always realized in particular instances of conversation between people . . . Hegel's dialectic is a monologue of thinking that seeks to carry out in advance what matures little by little in every genuine conversation.[13]

This passage suggests that Gadamer wants Hegel's dialectic without his Absolute Knowledge, or "Hegel without a System" as de Waelhens puts it.[14] Such a modified Hegelian dialectic is of considerable interest in its own right. It would of course be inconsistent with some of the other things Gadamer wants to say in this section. It would not in fact be grounded in the priority of the question. In it the question would be after all "teleologically" related to the answer, to knowledge. Gadamer reveals this in spite of himself at several points (we have already seen how his definition of the fulfilment of the question as "knowledge of not knowing" implies as much). For instance, he talks approvingly of the concern of the Socratic dialogue with "the immanent objective logic /immanente sachliche Konsequenz/ of what is unfolded in the dialogue". (WM 350; TM 331) In this dialogue "what emerges in its truth is the logos ...". (ibid.) "Dialectic as the art of conducting a conversation is also the art of seeing things in the unity of an aspect (sunoran eis hen eidos) i.e. it is the art of the formation of concepts as the working out of a common meaning." (ibid.) Elsewhere Gadamer says: "The deciding of the question is the way to knowledge". (WM 346; TM 329)

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[13] WM 351; TM 332f

[14] See the passage by de Waelhens quoted in Part Two, Chapter 4(a) below.

Or again: "Only a person who has questions can have knowledge . . . ". (WM 347; TM 328) Even if in Gadamer the question is in fact teleologically" related to knowledge, this does not altogether invalidate his re-appraisal of the role of the question; there is still room for the relative priority of the question within the context of knowledge. In this sense thinking is asking questions, is "orientation towards openness" (WM 349; TM 330). But the questions are relative, determinate questions, the openness is determinate openness; and they are always within the context of knowledge. They are very different from what Heidegger means by thinking as questioning and as orientation towards openness. Gadamer may justifiably polemicize against unquestioning (and "unthinking") dogmatism and received opinion as inferior forms of knowledge, but this is not so very different from the theme of most genuine philosophizing, and is very different from the radical reversal of question and answer (statement, apophantic logic) which Heidegger undertakes. Gadamer joins Plato as a follower of Socrates, that is, he rejects pseudo-knowledge and pseudo-questions and seeks a real openness to the logic of "the thing itself". Thus he goes the way of "dialectic"[15] which ultimately brings him close to Hegel, but takes him away from Heidegger who tries to go back up the (in his view) false trail from Plato to Hegel and re-discover its forgotten beginning.

The fact that Gadamer's logic of question and answer should turn out to resemble some modified form of Hegelian dialectic which

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[15] For the ambiguities surrounding Gadamer's appropriation of "dialectic", see Chapter 8(b) below.

is related only problematically to Heideggerian ontology assumes considerable importance when we turn to the problem of truth, which is after all the fundamental issue of Truth and Method. For any thinking which remains within the realm of Hegelian logic (as Gadamer, we have suggested, may in some sense be said to do), truth can only be, as it is for Hegel, the whole.[16] Any "correspondence" theory of truth (i.e. correspondence between our ideas and some "things-in-themselves") is ruled out from the start. Gadamer will have no truck with any "things-in-themselves"; all that is, is meaning. Truth can only take the form of some sort of "coherence" theory of truth where truth emerges from the interplay or dialectic of meanings (i.e. of interpretations). This is what Gadamer seems to have in mind (although he does not use the term "coherence theory of truth" which is perhaps only used in Anglo-Saxon philosophy). But in such a theory anything less than the whole, anything less than the elaboration of the totality of the determinations of thought (Hegel), anything less (in Gadamer's case) than the total "Conversation" which is constituted by all particular conversations, is only partially true. And without any relation to the whole it cannot be said to be true at all. It is not entirely clear whether Gadamer thinks there is any such whole. Later in his discussion of "the speculative structure of language" he says that a word "has a relation to a whole, through which alone it is a word".[17] (WM 434; TM 415) But this whole seems to be the Heideggerian implicit totality (the "totality of involvements") and is quite different

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[16] PS 11 (HW II 15)

[17] See Chapter 8(a) and (b) below.

from the Hegelian implicit totality (the "totality of the determinations of thought").[18] While a Hegelian implicit totality may be unknown in fact and merely anticipated (as in Pannenberg), the Heideggerian implicit totality is unknowable in principle. Hence Gadamer (if he follows Heidegger) would have to hold that Hegel was wrong not merely because he claimed to know a whole which he in fact didn't, but because he claimed to know a whole which he in principle couldn't. All of which presents grave difficulties for Gadamer's view of truth, since the whole not only cannot be known, it also cannot even be anticipated. We may wonder how much remains of the "coherence" theory of truth when even the anticipation of the whole is ruled out in principle. In fact Gadamer attempts to ground his claim that truth is a possibility for human Understanding on Heidegger's ontological view of truth. But Heidegger is concerned with truth as the openness or the clearing of Being, with truth which is prior to logic.[19] The fact that Gadamer's discussion of a logic of question and answer seems to remain on the logical level has this important consequence; in so doing it tends to cut Gadamer's dialectic off from the realm in which he seeks to ground his claim that truth emerges from that dialectic. It seems at this stage that Gadamer has not in fact managed to repeat the epistemological question after the ontology (to use Ricoeur's terms cited above); the truth which he tries to carry over from the ontological to the logical level seems to dissolve in his hands.

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[18] See the end of Chapter 7 and also Chapter 8(c) below.

[19] For a fuller treatment of Gadamer's concept of truth see Chapter 7 below.

We must now turn to the third part of Truth and Method where Gadamer brings together language and ontology, and examine whether he can effect this transition from ontology to logic more successfully there. However our examination of his "logic of question and answer" has inspired a sense of the difficulty of the task he faces rather than any great confidence in his ability to succeed. It has also perhaps placed Gadamer's philosophical efforts in a broader philosophical (and also theological) context. For the problem of the relation of logic and ontology which faces Gadamer goes beyond the question of the methodology of the human sciences and ultimately merges into the cloud of problems (or mysteries?) which envelops the relation of essence and existence, of logos and Being, of reason and God. In this context his attempts to show that truth is possible for human Understanding are of interest to both philosophy and theology, and can be instructive even when they fail to unravel problems (or mysteries?) which have eluded even the greatest thinkers.

CHAPTER SIX

UNDERSTANDING AND LANGUAGE

We must pursue our examination of Gadamer's concept of Understanding by turning to his attempt to ground the process of Understanding in language. For Gadamer language is not a form in which Understanding is subsequently embodied; the whole thrust of his argument goes in the opposite direction. Language is rather the medium in which Understanding realizes itself; it is in language, and only in language, that Understanding happens. However Gadamer wants to distance himself even further from any understanding of language as the subsequent form of Understanding. For him not only is Understanding inseparable from language, but language actually has in some sense priority in the Understanding process (priority, that is, over the self-consciousness of whoever is engaged in Understanding). In this Gadamer is following the direction of Heidegger who, starting from language as expression of "discourse" /Rede/ which as an "existential" is "equiprimordial" with Understanding,[1] increasingly saw language as the key to his ontological enquiries. Starting from his statement in Being and Time, that "There-being has language" (BT 208), Heidegger would increasingly stress the priority of language in the "Being-process" so that later he will say that language is "the house of Being",[2] and finally that it is language itself that speaks.[3] Language even comes to replace the term "Being" as the

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[1] See BT section 34.

[2] See Über den Humanismus, p.5.

[3] See Unterwegs zur Sprache, p.12; Poetry, Language and Thought, p.190.

focus of Heidegger's quest. However we are not called upon here to follow Heidegger's way to the mystery of language.[4] Gadamer works out his concept of language as it emerges from his examination of Understanding and the hermeneutical experience in relative independence of Heidegger, though of course Heidegger remains a profound though often hidden influence in Gadamer's thought.

For Gadamer then, language, far from being the external expression or the tool of Understanding, in fact has absolute priority in the Understanding process. Language is in a sense the real "subject" of that process in that the "fusion of horizons that takes place in Understanding is the proper achievement of language". (WM 359; TM 340) That Understanding as it finds it culmination in the hermeneutical experience should be grounded in the priority of language has already been indicated by the fact that the key analogy for Understanding is the dialogue or conversation.[5] Understanding as conversation is grounded in language; and it is from "the conversation that we are"[6] that we must attempt to draw near to the mystery of language. (WM 360 TM 340) And just as we said that for Gadamer language has priority in the Understanding process, so in conversation it is not so much we

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[4] Beyond agreeing with Gadamer, against those who dismiss Heidegger's writings on language as mere mystification and obscurantism, that "what language is is one of the most obscure questions given to man to ponder". (WM 359; TM 340)

[5] This comes out more clearly in German where the etymological connection of Sprache (language) and Gespräch (conversation) is apparent.

[6] Inasmuch as Understanding is an "existential".

(as self-conscious subjects) who control and direct the conversation as it is the conversation which controls and directs us. (WM 345; TM 361) Understanding as conversation "happens to us". (ibid.) In other words:

> . . . a conversation has a spirit of its own, and the language in which it takes place bears its own truth within itself, i.e. it "reveals" /entbirgt/ something and lets something emerge which henceforth is.

As we see in the above quotation, a conversation is concerned with a "something", with a subject matter /Sache/, just as Understanding is concerned with what is said (e.g. in a text) and not with the states of consciousness or the "experiences" /Erlebnisse/[8] of the author or reader.[9] In the "conversation" between text and interpreter there is an attempt to reach an understanding /Verständigung/ about the matter at issue. This understanding will be in linguistic form, not, Gadamer remarks, in the sense that it is subsequently put into words, but in the sense that the fulfilment of Understanding is the "coming-to-language" of "the thing itself" /die Sache selbst/, the subject-matter concerning which an understanding is sought. (WM 360; TM 341)

Access to this "thing itself", the emergence of which is the goal of Understanding, is not to be achieved as in methodologically precise scientific procedure (and in all thought which is orientated towards such a procedure) by excluding (at least in principle) language and its distortions, its "bewitchments". For Gadamer the

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[7] WM 361; TM 345.

[8] For "experience" see Part Two, Chapter 2, note 1, below.

[9] Though no doubt states of consciousness and "experiences" can become the subject matter of Understanding by a secondary thematization.

"thing itself" is not "beyond language" as it is in the "metaphysical"[10] tradition from Plato to Positivism. The "thing itself" only is inasmuch as it "comes-to-language", according to Gadamer; and it only "comes-to-language" in a conversation or dialogue. In this fundamentally linguistic process the prejudices of the participants are not to be excluded rigorously but, as we have seen, are to be brought consciously into the play of the conversation. This bringing into play of prejudices, of horizons of meaning, is intimately connected with the linguistic nature of Understanding, a connection which the champions of scientific method indirectly confirm when they try to escape from what they see as the distortions and prejudices of language. The emergence of the "thing itself" in conversation means not the exclusion of the language and the prejudices of either of the parties, but the transformation of both when a common language emerges which is necessarily a "new" language, in the sense that this common language, this fusion of horizons, did not exist before. Thus the fulfilment of Understanding in the emergence of the "thing itself" in a common language is always an event:

> . . . in a successful conversation (or dialogue) both partners come under the influence of the truth of the subject matter (or "thing itself") which binds them into a new community /Gemeinsamkeit/. Understanding in a conversation (or dialogue) is not a mere setting forth of one's own position but a transformation into "the common" /das Gemeinsame/ in which one does not remain what one was.[11]

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[10] "Metaphysical" in Heidegger's sense, though as we shall see, Gadamer wants to give a rather more positive reading of the metaphysical tradition than Heidegger. See Part One, Chapter 8 below.

[11] WM 360; TM 341.

All this can be seen with particular clarity, Gadamer tells us, in the extreme hermeneutical situation of translation. (WM 362ff; TM 346ff) The translator does not as it were extract some non-linguistic entity (the "thing-in-itself") from one language and re-embody it in another. The "agony" of translation is precisely that what is said in the original seems so inseparable from the language of the original. The "ecstasy" of translation, we might suggest, is that it is nevertheless possible, by a to-ing and fro-ing, an interplay, a sort of dialogue, between the language of the original and the language of the interpreter, for what is said in the original to come-to-language in the language of the interpreter. But this coming-to-language will not be a mere transposition of some detachable "thing-in-itself" into a new linguistic embodiment (or "symbolic form"), it will be rather an interpretation of what is said in the original; and as such it will be both the same as the original (it is the same subject-matter that is being interpreted) and yet different (the horizon and the language that the interpreter necessarily brings with him means that the interpretation is something new, is an event.)

For Gadamer, then, translation is not a special case different from interpretation but is merely an extreme instance of what always happens in interpretation. It brings out what holds good for all interpretation - that Understanding is not achieved apart from language:

> Even in such extreme situations, in which it is necessary to translate from one language into another, the subject matter can scarcely be separated from language. Only that translator can succeed /wird wahrhaft nachbilden/ who brings to language the subject-matter pointed to by the text, i.e. who finds a language which is not only his own but which is also appropriate to the original. The situation of the translator and the situation of the interpreter are fundamentally the same.[12]

Just as in translation there is no non-linguistic understanding which is subsequently embodied in a different language, so in all Understanding there is no non-linguistic understanding which is then given linguistic expression. The finding of a common language coincides with the realization of Understanding in which an understanding is reached. (WM 365; TM 349f) Gadamer sums up: ". . . language is the universal medium /Medium/[13] in which Understanding is realized. The mode of realization of Understanding is interpretation." (WM 366; TM 350) This means that wrestling to find the right word, to find a common language, is not a secondary and subsequent undertaking; it is not a matter of finding the linguistic expression for an understanding we already possess in a non-linguistic way. On the contrary, Gadamer tells us that "in reality the problems of linguistic expression are already problems of Understanding itself". (ibid.)

Gadamer's examination of Understanding has moved through his survey of the history of the concept of Understanding in the human sciences to Gadamer's own conception of Understanding in terms of what he calls "the hermeneutical experience". Understanding as "the hermeneutical experience" with its "fusion of horizons" takes place

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[12] WM 364; TM 349.

[13] For language as medium and for Gadamer's evocative if rather elusive phrase "the centre of language" /die Mitte der Sprache/ see Part One, Chapter 8(a), especially note 2, below.

always and only in the medium of language. It is this fundamental linguisticality of Understanding on which Truth and Method will increasingly focus attention as it draws to a close.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LANGUAGE, TRUTH AND CORRECTNESS

Before proceeding to Gadamer's explicit concentration on language as such, on language as that which grounds all Understanding and hence all Being (i.e. language as "the horizon of a hermeneutical ontology"), it is worth staying a little longer with Gadamer's presentation of language as the medium of the hermeneutical experience; for in this transition (with all its recapitulation and anticipation) from the examination of the hermeneutical experience to the examination of language itself there comes into focus a number of issues which pertain to the heart of Gadamer's philosophical enterprise. The section on the linguisticality of the hermeneutical object (WM 367-73; TM 351-357) deals with the relative strengths and weaknesses of speech and writing as modes of communication. We need not linger over this discussion, beyond remarking that what is at stake for Gadamer is the overcoming of all psychologism which might limit the free play of horizons of meaning with normative concepts like the mind of the author (mens auctoris) or the mind of the original addressee. (WM 372f; TM 356f).

The section on the linguisticality of the hermeneutical act or achievement /Vollzug/ (WM 373-382; TM 357-366) has more to say about the basic issues with which Gadamer is concerned. To consider the linguisticality of Understanding is, according to Gadamer, to express from a different perspective what has already been pointed to in the section on the dialogue of question and answer. (WM 373; TM 357) By this Gadamer presumably means that we are now focussing explicity on the linguisticality of the achievement of the "fusion of horizons" through the

conversation of question and answer. Gadamer repeats the by now familiar criticism of the naïveté of any historicism in which the historian unconsciously apprehends his object in terms of his own conceptual framework. Such naïveté merely indicates insufficient reflection on the part of the historian; but when the historian imagines he can step out of his own concepts and think in the concepts of the epoch he is seeking to understand the results are disastrous. In doing this the historian sets himself an impossible task, not in the sense of an unattainable ideal, but in the sense of a dangerous absurdity, for he is attempting to exclude that which alone makes Understanding possible. (Paraphrase of WM 374; TM 357f) As we have stressed throughout this study, it is an absolutely fundamental tenet of Gadamer that some sort of pre-understanding (or prejudice, as Gadamer likes to call it) is the condition of the possibility of Understanding, a condition that is absolute and inescapable /unaufhebbar/. As Gadamer now puts it:

> To think historically is to achieve the transposition /die Umsetzung/ which the concepts of the past undergo when we try to think in them.[1]

And as Gadamer has insisted above, "we" are not separable from our concepts, our prejudices, our "World". (WM 288f; TM 271f) He now says that "to interpret means precisely to bring our preconceptions with us into the play /of the Understanding process/, so that the meaning of the text is really made to speak for us". (WM 375; TM 358) Hence, says Gadamer, there is no such thing as an interpretation which is correct "in itself"; such an interpretation is "a foolish ideal which fails to understand the nature of tradition". (ibid.) Interpretation

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[1] WM 288f; TM 358.

is tied to the hermeneutical situation in which it finds itself. (ibid.)

That all interpretation is thus tied to a situation (its "Situationsgebundenheit") does not mean however that there is no such thing as correctness, that all interpretation is given over to subjectivity and relativity, Gadamer assures us. (WM 375; TM 359) The act of interpretation is not something secondary, a pedagogical device, but it is the very act of Understanding itself, it is itself, Gadamer says, "the concretion of meaning". (ibid.) The element of application, Gadamer reminds us, is an integral part of the Understanding process. (ibid.) But the variety of ways in which a text is understood does not condemn us to relativism, Gadamer claims, and it is language itself that secures us against such a fate:

> That the claim to truth of every interpretation is not in the least relativized thereby /i.e. by the difference of each interpretation from every other/ is clear from the fact that all interpretation is essentially linguistic.[2]

Such a claim stands out as the crux of Gadamer's philosophical enterprise. As we have indicated at an earlier stage,[3] it is with the concept of language that Gadamer seeks to justify his claim that the irreducible variety of ways in which a text represents itself does not mean a fall into a flux of mere appearances. Despite our radical finitude and historicality, truth is still a real human possibility. (WM 284f; TM 268) As we see now, Gadamer holds that language is somehow the guarantee of this. Why this should be Gadamer attempts to make clear in the next few sentences. What is important for Gadamer is that the linguistic explicitness that any understanding gains through interpretation

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[2] ibid.

[3] See the end of Chapter 1(b) above.

(i.e. when an understanding which is implicit - but not for that reason non-linguistic, Gadamer would have us believe - is put into words) does not create a second meaning alongside that which is understood and interpreted. (ibid.) An interpretation is not therefore alongside of some "thing-in-itself", and hence there can be no question of comparing these, as is the case in correspondence theories of truth. For Gadamer, as for Heidegger, truth is not (at least not "primordially" in Heidegger's sense) a matter of adequatio intellectus et rei.[4] The concepts we use in interpreting have no independent existence alongside of what is being interpreted. They are not "thematic ". (WM 375; TM 359) They as it were disappear behind that which they bring to language in the interpretation. (ibid.) Indeed, and paradoxically, it is precisely in this ability to disappear into what is said that the correctness of an interpretation consists. (WM 375f; TM 359) Thus it is of the essence of an interpretation that it should present itself as that which is destined immediately to disappear. Its being is its disappearance into what is interpreted, we might say. As Gadamer says:

> And yet at the same time it is true that it /an interpretation/ must come to presentation as that whose definition is to disappear /dass sie als zum Verschwinden bestimmte zur Darstellung kommen muss/.[5]

This passage clearly owes something to Heidegger's description in Being and Time of the inconspicuousness of the ready-to-hand.[6] To cite

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[4] See BT 257ff. Heidegger does not rule out such a correspondence theory of truth; he merely denies its status as the "primordial" or original nature of truth. What subsequent role it might play, is, however, far from clear. It is precisely this unclarity which Gadamer may be said to be attempting to remedy.

[5] WM 376; TM 359.

[6] See BT secs. 15 and 16.

Heidegger's famous example, we only notice a hammer when for some reason or another we are prevented from using it. The hammer only becomes an "object", only becomes "thematic", for us by some breach of our unconscious relation to it in which it is, as it were, totally transparent to what we are doing with it. Gadamer does not mention Heidegger at this point, but there can be little doubt that his description of interpretation here (a description which holds a central place in the movement of Truth and Method) is indebted to Heidegger in this respect. Without there being a systematic correspondence between Heidegger's description of the inconspicuousness of the tool and Gadamer's description of interpretation, there are nevertheless unmistakable analogies. Not only does interpretation only do its job by being transparent to what it is interpreting, by being "unthematic", it is also the case that what is to be interpreted (i.e. tradition - or rather the contents of tradition) only becomes an "object" when there is a breach with the immediate unconscious intimacy with tradition (hence any "objective" approach in the human sciences is in Heidegger's sense "derivative").

A detailed examination of these analogies between Heidegger and Gadamer would no doubt be worth pursuing, but it would lead the present study too far afield. Moreover Gadamer's description of interpretation points not only back to its roots in Heidegger but also forward, we might say, to Hegel.[7] For the motif which emerges here, the motif of this mediating interpretation on which the possibility of Understanding is dependent (ibid.) and which, although different, is transparent to the

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[7] To parody the title of George Lichteim's book From Marx to Hegel we might say that Gadamer is on the way "from Heidegger to Hegel".

same, and only by being different can allow the same to present itself, this motif is what Gadamer calls "the speculative". It is in "the speculative structure" of language that Gadamer will attempt ultimately to ground his philosophical endeavour.

We shall examine Gadamer's presentation of "the speculative structure" of language below. For the moment it is important to stay with Gadamer at this point and to press the question how it is that language with its "speculative structure" (even if Gadamer has not yet explicitly used this term) can be the guarantee of the correctness of an interpretation. What does it mean to say that the correctness of an interpretation can be authenticated by its capacity to disappear into what is said? As we have seen, this unity of what is to be interpreted with the interpretation precludes any attempt to compare them. Truth is not the identity of what is to be interpreted and the interpretation in the sense of an identity which is first constituted by a consciousness which compares the two. According to Gadamer, what is to be interpreted, the interpretation and the interpreting consciousness that is supposed to compare the latter two cannot be separated in this way. On the contrary, they form a unity which is absolutely prior to any subsequent attempt to separate them. Gadamer's emphasis throughout Truth and Method has been that we cannot begin with an independent consciousness which we subsequently relate to its "objects", in this case tradition; tradition and the interpreter form what we might call an ontological unity which is prior to any subsequent separation.[8] Nor, according to Gadamer, is an interpretation merely a tool in the

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[8] In this Gadamer is adhering to the basic contention of Being and Time that There-being and World are "equiprimordial", that "Being-in-World" is absolutely prior.

the control of the interpreting consciousness. What is to be interpreted and the interpretation also form an ontological unity, for only in the interpretation is what is to be interpreted for the interpreter. And according to Gadamer this ontological unity which embraces what is to be interpreted, interpretation and interpreter is grounded in language; or better perhaps, language is this ontological unity.[9]

Now just as Heidegger's point in Being and Time was that truth as adequatio intellectus et rei was subsequent to, and derivative of, a more primordial sort of truth which was the uncovering, the unhiddenness (a-lētheia) of beings, a truth which is founded in the structure of "Being-in-the-World" (BT 261); so we might infer that for Gadamer too truth is a more primordial phenomenon than any comparison of what is to be interpreted and the interpretation, and is rather the "letting-be", the "disclosure", of what is to be interpreted in the interpretation for the interpreter. And as for Heidegger in Being and Time this primordial truth was grounded in the fundamental ontological unity of "Being-in-the-World", so for Gadamer truth would be grounded in the fundamental ontological unity of language.

This, let it be emphasized, is not what Gadamer says in so many words in Truth and Method. It is merely a "likely story" which attempts to make sense of Gadamer's text. And likely enought it may perhaps be, except that it fails to take account of the way in which Gadamer attempts to move decisively beyond Heidegger. This movement beyond Heidegger does not so much consist in Gadamer's grounding of truth in language rather than "Being-in-the-World", for in this Gadamer is merely following the way of Heidegger himself. The real difference is that Gadamer

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[9] With the proviso that, since it first allows beings to be, language itself is not a being and hence in a sense cannot be said "to be".

does not merely attempt to go beneath the superficiality of a correspondence theory of truth to some "primordial" truth. He is more interested in the "return journey", in showing how truth is possible not only as some primordial experience of the openness of Being, but also as "correctness". It is significant that Gadamer says, not that "Situationsgebundenheit" does not detract from the claim to truth of interpretation, but that it does not detract from its correctness /Richtigkeit/. (WM 375; TM 359) Similarly the capacity of disappearing guarantees not the truth but the correctness of the interpretation. (WM 375f; TM 359) That this distinction is more than merely verbal is corroborated by what we have already noted about Gadamer's philosophical aims as compared with those of Heidegger. It is Gadamer's intention to overcome the dangerous isolation of philosophy from the sciences in the thought of Heidegger,[10] to put Heidegger's ontological discoveries to work in the sciences (specifically the "human sciences"), to show how Heidegger's enquiries into the question of Being have consequences for the logic of question and answer which allows a particular being or matter /Sache/ to be spoken about. Hence Gadamer is concerned not only with truth as some primordial event of Being, but with truth in the more ordinary sense of correctness, specifically the correctness of a particular historical interpretation with reference to a particular historical matter /Sache/. It is this latter truth in the sense of correctness that Gadamer says is legitimated by the capacity of an interpretation to "disappear" into what is interpreted. And this "disappearing act" is intimately connected with, and ultimately grounded in, the

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[10] See KS III-200; PH 196.

essence of language which is, as we shall see, to bring its object to presentation by itself being, in its self-presentation, perfectly transparent to the object.[11]

The present writer must simply confess his inability to follow the move that Gadamer makes at this point. It seems that Gadamer wants somehow to fuse the process (if we may call it such) by which something is (in the Heideggerian sense that it means something to someone, is "brought to language") and the process by which something is the particular thing, the particular "what" that it is. What the present writer cannot see is how the capacity of language to disappear into what it says has anything to do with what is said. This capacity of language is indeed the "wonder of wonders", for it is only through it that anything can be at all. One can see why Gadamer could bring together this capacity of language with the phenomenon of truth as Heidegger understood this, i.e. truth as the primordial openness, the unhiddenness (a-letheia) of beings.[12] But truth as correctness is concerned with whether what is said is identical with what it is said about. The identity that correctness is concerned with is the identity of logic and not some identity of Being in Heidegger's sense. Or to use the terminology of Being and Time, we might say that the latter identity is ontological (that language should be identical with, should disappear into, what is said is an a priori structural necessity), whereas the

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[11] We might also say that language reflects or throws back the mirror-image of the object, hence the "speculative" nature of language.

[12] Though of course one must immediately add that for Heidegger this unhiddenness is accompanied by hiddenness. Truth for Heidegger in its essence comports an element of untruth because Being for Heidegger is finite. (One might add that it is one thing to say that Being as appropriated by finite human beings is permeated by that finitude, but quite another to say, as Heidegger appears to do, that Being itself is finite.)

former identity is ontic (it has to do with how things happen to be in this particular case). The question then is how these two come together in such a way that ontological identity guarantees ontic identity, as Gadamer says it does (if not in precisely these terms).

It may be possible to go some way towards answering this question by invoking that most controversial of notions: dialectic. We have already met with the term in our chapter on "the dialogue of question and answer";[13] and we shall meet it again in the next chapter when we examine Gadamer's notion of "the speculative structure of language". For the moment we must simply sketch out the relation of dialectic to the question formulated above (as far as the present writer can understand this relation). It is not surprising that, caught between an apparently formal or abstract identity of thought (or utterance) and thing on one hand and a contingent identity of thought (or utterance) and thing on the other, Gadamer should go the way of dialectic. In this he is following Hegel who also sought a via media between the abstract or formal identity of a Schelling[14] on the one hand, and on the other the correspondence theory of truth as correctness which persisted even in Kant.[15] For Gadamer as for Hegel (though not in the same way as for Hegel), truth is not the comparison of thought (or, in Gadamer's case, words) and things, for there are no "things" apart from thought (or words). Nor is truth some a priori formal identity of which we may, on privileged occasions, have an immediate intuition. For both Gadamer and Hegel (though of course in different

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13 See Chapter 5 above.

14 In whose Absolute, according to Hegel's famous gibe, all cows are black; see PS 9 (HW II 13).

15 According to Heidegger; see BT 258.

ways) truth as a purely formal identity is not denied; but it only achieves its reality by being worked out, by being mediated, in the concrete dialectic of history. One can perhaps interpret Gadamer's position as being something like as follows: there is a formal (ontological) identity between language and what is spoken of; however this identity, while formally (ontologically) prior, must nevertheless be achieved or realized materially (ontically) in concrete dialogue (dialectic). Word and thing may be formally (ontologically) identical; but that this word should be identical with this thing, that this interpretation should be identical with this thing-to-be-interpreted, must be worked out in the dialogue of question and answer. Hence we might say that the ontological unity of word and thing is the "truth" (in Heidegger's sense) on the basis of which the ontical "correctness" of this word to this thing is possible. But not only is "ontological truth" the condition of the possibility of "ontical correctness" (more or less Heidegger's position - at least in Being and Time); the former is only real as the latter, it only becomes concrete in the latter. Thus we meet again the "speculative" motif which was said to chatacterize language as such. However the identity-in-difference structure which characterizes the relation of word and thing stands itself in an indentity-in-difference structure which relates it to the finding of the correct word for this thing. This would be analogous to the way in which in Hegel's thought the identity-in-difference structure of purely formal logical

relations stands itself in an identity-in-difference structure which relates it to the material world.[16]

In some such way it might be possible to explain what Gadamer means when he says that language guarantees the correctness of interpretation. The truth that binds together word and thing in a primordial way must be concretized in the dialogical process of finding the correct word for this thing. Whether or not the analogy with Hegel was helpful in illuminating Gadamer, it at least serves to show how Gadamer differs radically from Hegel in at least one respect. For in Hegel's thought the concrete dialectic succeeds in mediating the Idea to itself, in realizing the formal relations of logic, only by working up the contents of thought into the ultimate totality Hegel calls Absolute Knowledge. It is only by returning to itself as Absolute Spirit that the process of the "going out" of the Idea from itself (one is tempted - with historical justification - to talk of the Idea's "self-emptying"[17]) receives its validation. This means that truth must wait upon the completion of the process, the return of the Idea to itself in Absolute Spirit. "The true is the whole."[18]

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16 Or in terms of the Philosophy of Religion, the way in which the identity-in-difference structure of the inner life of God (i.e. the ontological or immanent Trinity) stands itself in the identity-in-difference structure of God's relation to the world (the economic Trinity). For the "double Trinity" in Hegel, see E. Fackenheim, The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), pp.149-154.

17 As A.V. Miller does when he translates the "Entäusserung" of the Phänomenologie by "kenosis".

18 PS 11 (HW II 15).

Apart from the whole there is no truth, and prior to the whole such partial truth as there is is an anticipation, a prefiguring, of the whole.[19]

In Hegel, then, the realization, the concretization, the "dialectical self-presentation", of the merely formal relations of logic is dependent on the complete elaboration of the contents of thought. This elaboration cancels yet preserves /aufhebt/ the notion of truth as correctness with its opposition of thought to the thing-in-itself. This opposition becomes the opposition of thought to itself (since the thing-in-itself is always for me[20]), but this latter opposition is still the opposition of the contents of thought. These contents become ever more general as the dialectic develops, and with the culmination of the dialectic in Absolute Knowledge they become, as it were, universal or formal, but with a universality or formality that is achieved, is realized, so that we may talk of an instantiated formality or a concrete universality. When Hegel has finished the Phenomenology he can proceed to unfold the System in general and the Logic in particular, which presuppose the ascent to Absolute Knowledge. What is important for us in all this is the fact that the notion of truth as correctness (correctness not in the sense of the adjustment of thought to some thing-in-itself - adequatio intellectus et rei - but of the immanent adjustment of the self-contractory "moments" of the

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19 Pannenberg is thoroughly Hegelian in this respect, though of course in other respects he goes in a very different direction from Hegel.

20 See PS 52ff (HW II 64ff).

contents of thought[21]) does play a role in allowing truth in its most profound sense to be realized. But "correctness" can only mediate "truth" in its profound sense by being elevated, cancelled and preserved /aufgehoben/ by the totality of the determinations of thought, by Absolute Knowledge.

Now for Gadamer such Absolute Knowledge is in principle impossible for human beings. It seems to follow from this that correctness could never be legimated. For Gadamer as we have seen there can be no correctness in the sense of a simple comparison of thought and thing-in-itself. Gadamer has gone the way of dialectic where the correctness of an interpretation must be worked out in the dialogue of question and answer.[22] But if this dialogue is in principle endless, never to be completed, how is it ever possible to say that an interpretation is correct? From Hegel's point of view it is impossible. At this point Gadamer does in fact tend to appeal to a "whole", but this is not "the totality of the determinations of thought" that Hegel had in mind when he said that "the true is the whole". It is rather the whole or totality that

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21 The development of this by the British "Neo-Hegelians" is often called the "coherence" theory of truth as opposed to the "correspondence" theory of truth of the "Realists".

22 This is what Gadamer seems to be saying from one point of view. Elsewhere he says that "the dialectic of question and answer always precedes the dialectic of interpretation". (WM 447; TM 429) Presumably in this latter passage he is using "interpretation" /Auslegung/ in the sense of specialized literary or philological interpretation. This latter would then be "derivative" of the more basic activity of interpretation which is a fundamental mode of human being. This distinction does not seem directly to affect our argument here.

that we find in Being and Time, the "totality of involvements" /Bewandtnisganzheit/, the totality of implicit relations and references which make up a "World".[23] It is beyond our scope to go into this question of the meaning of "totality" in Hegel, Heidegger and Gadamer. As far as our present argument is concerned, what matters is that Heidegger's totality is the essentially hidden ground of particular involvements, and any revelation of it comes only in some extraordinary primordial experience. It is decidedly not the completed elaboration of the totality of the determinations of thought which might validate a particular interpretation. It is highly doubtful whether Gadamer can derive from Heidegger a totality which will guarantee the correctness of a particular interpretation; though the revelation of a "totality of involvements" in Heidegger's sense may well have something to do with a primordial experience of "truth".

Gadamer can of course always say that truth cannot be limited to the logical determinations of thought, that Hegel has missed the depth dimension of truth that Heidegger points to. Maybe so. But Gadamer's specific project (over against Heidegger) is apparently to show how truth as correctness, as the ontical correctness of this interpretation with regard to this matter or content /Sache/ is the concretization or instantiation of the ontological or formal concept of truth as the a priori identity of word and thing. And it is very difficult to see how Gadamer can justify his confidence in the possibility of truth as correctness when he rejects both the "correspondence" theory of truth (with its "thing-in-itself") and the "coherence" theory of truth (with its logical whole, the totality of the determinations of thought). He

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[23] See BT 118.

may opt for a different sort of theory of truth altogether, as did Heidegger when he located truth at a level prior to the "derivative" notion of truth as correctness. But then the onus is on Gadamer to show that language is not only the home of ontological "truth" but also somehow the guarantee of ontic correctness. For more light on this rather obscure aspect of Gadamer's philosophical enterprise, we must now examine in more detail Gadamer's treatment of "the speculative structure of language".

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE SPECULATIVE STRUCTURE OF LANGUAGE

(a) "The Centre of Language"

In a chapter in which he will attempt to show the analogies between his own philosophical hermeneutics and the metaphysical tradition stretching from the Greeks to Hegel, Gadamer begins by differentiating clearly between his own view of the interrelations between language, Being and truth, and the view which, despite all its variations, remains the basic theme of the metaphysical tradition. The Greek view is theological, says Gadamer[1] (WM 432; TM 414); it saw the Being of beings /das Sein des Seienden/ as a being /ein Seiendes/ which completes itself in thought. (ibid.) This highest and most real being, which gathers into itself the Being of all beings, is nous. (ibid.) The articulating logos brings to language the structure of the being /"des Seienden", perhaps still referring to "the highest being" which is nous/, and this coming-to-language is for Greek thought the presence of that being itself, its truth. (WM 432f; TM 414) It is in terms of this infinite presence as its own completed possibility, as its own divinity, that human thought understands itself. (WM 433; TM 414) This thumb-nail sketch of Greek metaphysics is, despite its extreme condensation, recognisable enough, it is also couched in such a way as to make clear what Gadamer means when he calls Hegel's philosophy the renewal of Greek metaphysics on the basis of subjectivity. (WM 433; TM 414f) Both of these, however, Gadamer rejects, since neither, he believes, does

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[1] Echoing Heidegger's critique of "onto-theo-logy" in Identity and Difference, pp.42-76 (for German, p.107-143); see also the Introduction to "Was ist Metaphysik?", pp.19f.

justice to the finitude of our historical experience. (WM 433; TM 415) More appropriate to this finitude and historicality is the phenomenon of language which, for Gadamer, does not merely copy a pre-existing structure of Being, but in which the order and structure of our experience is first of all, and in constantly changing ways, formed. (ibid.) It is, as Gadamer puts it, from the centre of language /die Mitte der Sprache/[2] that our whole experience of "World" and in particular the hermeneutical experience unfolds. (ibid.)

It is in this "centre of language" that for Gadamer language, Being and truth hang together. Language for Gadamer is not the copy of pre-given order of Being whose true relations lie under the gaze of an Infinite Spirit. (ibid.) Nor is language an instrument to be used like the language of mathematics to construct an objectified, calculable universe which is at our disposal. (ibid.) Neither the Infinite Spirit of "onto-theo-logy" nor the infinite Will-to-Power of modern technological man is appropriate to our finitude. "It is only the centre of language which, related to the totality of beings, mediates the finite, historical essence of human being with itself and with the world." (ibid.)

It is only in the centre of language, Gadamer tells us, that the dialectical puzzle of the One and the Many which has exercised a fascination on the minds of philosophers from Plato to Hegel finds its

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[2] The English phrase does not catch the resonance of the German. "Mitte" means middle or mean or medium. It also echoes: a) "Mittel" which is a means to an end or a physical medium; b) "der Mittler" which means "the Mediator"; and c) "Vermittlung" which is mediation in both the ordinary and the philosophical senses. Heidegger also talks of "eine einfache Mitte" between the primordial self-giving Logos and corresponding There-being, a "middle-point" which W.J. Richardson says is "the ontological difference as such"; see Richardson, op.cit., p.501.

true and ultimate grounding /seinen wahren Grund und Boden/. (ibid) But the real dialectic of the word in which there is always only one Word despite its articulation into a plurality of words is not the mere mirroring of logical content which we find, according to Gadamer, in Platonic and Augustinian dialectic. (WM 433f; TM 415) This real dialectic is to be found when a word "as it were breaks forth out of a centre /Mitte/ and has a relation to a whole, through which alone it is a word." (WM 434; TM 415) What exactly Gadamer is saying here the present writer is not sure. Talk of a word which "brings a World to presentation" by breaking forth out of a centre may have something to do with "the simple centre" /das einfache Mitte/ which Richardson says is the "ontological difference as such", the primordial breach in which World (Being) and There-being (the being which understands Being) emerge (see note 2 above). However to posit such a connection is to speculate, and it must be admitted that what exactly Gadamer means by "the centre of language" remains (at least to the present writer) rather elusive.

(b) "Dialectic"

However obscure may be the origin of the "dialectical" process in which one word brings to presentation the many implicit meanings or words which allow it to mean what it does mean, Gadamer has rather more to say about the process itself. A word, he tells us, makes the whole view of the world /Weltansicht/ which grounds it appear. (WM 434; TM 415f) In the moment of its happening, a word lets the unsaid /das Ungesagte/, at which it hints, simultaneously be there /lässt . . . mit da sein/. (WM 434; TM 416) This "occasionality" of language is not an unfortunate defect, but rather the expression of the living virtuality of language which brings into play a whole of meaning without being able wholly to express the latter. (ibid.) All human speaking, Gadamer tells us, is finite in such a way that it contains an infinity of meaning to be unfolded and interpreted. (ibid.)

We shall return to Gadamer's idea that what is said represents an infinity of the unsaid a little later when we come to his notion of "the speculative." For the moment we must make two remarks about Gadamer's "dialectic" of the Word and the words. First of all it is worth noting the curious reversal which the traditional dialectic undergoes in Gadamer's treatment. For in Gadamer it is no longer the words which manifest or articulate the unity of the infinite Word. It seems rather that the one finite, historical word represents the infinite variety of words or meanings which are implied by that one word. For Gadamer apparently the finite many do not represent the Infinite One, but rather the finite one represents the infinite many. But this makes one wonder whether "infinite" /unendlich/ is not being used in a very different sense in each case. The "infinity" of nous or of the divine Word is quite different from the "endlessness"

of the flux of Becoming.[1] Gadamer is of course quite entitled to reject the former and embrace the latter (as Nietzsche may be said to have done). It is however quite another matter to suggest that the latter is in some sense "the truth" of the former. This leads to the second point which is that Gadamer seems to be saying that his dialectic is the true dialectic to which previous versions of dialectic are more or less confused and distorted approximations. He appears to be giving a re-interpretation of the metaphysical idea of dialectic so as to reveal the truth which it obscurely points to; and in this he seems to be going the way of a "hermeneutics of belief"[2] which tends to re-interpret positively, rather than the way of a "hermeneutics of suspicion" which tends to interpret away false characterizations of reality. But one must ask at what point a re-interpretation becomes so different from what it is interpreting that it actually stops, despite its protestations to the contrary, being a recognizable interpretation and becomes simply a replacement of one thing by another. Each interpretation may no doubt, as Gadamer tells us, be different, but when does it become so different that it can no longer validly claim to be an interpretation at all? We will

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1 One might also argue that Gadamer's "infinity" seems close to Hegel's "bad infinity" which is mere "endlessness". See J.N. Findlay, Hegel: A Re-examination p.163.

2 To use the terminology of Paul Ricoeur. Examples of the demythologizing "hermeneutics of belief" would be Hegel and Bultmann; examples of the demystifying "hermeneutics of suspicion" would be Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Which camp Heidegger belongs to is not clear, though arguably he would, with his critique of the Western metaphysical tradition, tend towards Nietzsche and the "hermeneutics of suspicion", though there are of course also tendencies in the opposite direction. There are both "right wing" (Macquarrie) and "left wing" (Derrida) interpretations of Heidegger, a point made by Fergus Kerr in his unpublished 1977 Gunning Lectures in the University of Edinburgh. The ambiguity of Gadamer's position is discussed below.

have occasion to ask this question at several points in the analysis of Gadamer's text which follows. For the moment we must simply ask whether Gadamer's "dialectic" could really be said to give, in Hegelian fashion, the "truth" of previous thought on the subject; or whether Gadamer is not in fact, despite his protestations to the contrary, much closer to Nietzsche in his repudiation of the Infinite Word and his embracing of the endless play of the flux of Becoming?

Gadamer's re-interpretation of the motifs of the metaphysical tradition continues with his re-working of the idea of "participation" or "belongingness" /Zugehörigkeit/. In metaphysics "participation" means, Gadamer tells us, the transcendental relation between Being and truth in which knowledge is a moment of Being itself and not primarily an activity of the subject. (WM 434; TM 416) Such inherence /Einbezogenheit/ of knowledge in Being is the presupposition of ancient and mediaeval thought, as we can see above all in Plato's idea of the soul participating in the true world of the Ideas. (ibid.) Here there is no question of a self-certain world-less spirit having to relate itself subsequently to the world. Here world and self belong together in a primordial way; the relation between them is primary (or a priori). (WM 435; TM 416) Earlier thought conceived this relation in terms of the universal ontological function of teleology. (ibid.) But for modern science such an a priori relation of "participation" and its expression in terms of teleology has no legimacy. (WM 435; TM 417) The interrelatedness /Zuordnung/ of man and world which grounded the Logos philosophy of the ancient and mediaeval worlds has been dissolved. (ibid.)

German philosophy, however, from Leibniz to Hegel tried to combine the new science with the insights of the metaphysical tradition (WM 435; TM 417); and it is Gadamer's explicit intention to take up this task again.[3] (ibid.) Thus his examination of the hermeneutics of the human sciences leads him back to the problems of classical metaphysics. (WM 436; TM 417f) What the metaphysical tradition with its presupposition of the "participation" of knowledge in Being can offer to the modern world locked in its own subjectivity can be expressed as "dialectic" - the movement of Being or "the thing itself" which thought experiences. Hegel's dialectic is a conscious appropriation of the Greek heritage. (WM 436; TM 418) Gadamer claims that his own hermeneutical theory with its interwovenness of event /Geschehen/ and Understanding is indebted to Greek thought as well as to Hegel. (ibid.) But this recognition of his debts does not mean that he is attempting to renew the classical doctrine of the intelligibility of Being or to transfer it to the historical world. (WM 436f; TM 418) This, says Gadamer, would be merely a repetition of Hegel which is untenable not only in view of Kant and the empirical standpoint of modern science, but also in view of the fact that we no longer experience history in terms of any knowledge of divine salvation.[4]

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[3] For Gadamer's positive assessment of the insights of classical metaphysics cf. KSI 63f; PH 74ff. There Gadamer tells us that the "infinite correspondence of soul and Being" which metaphysics pointed to resides in language.

[4] One might wish that Gadamer had expanded a little on his reasons for not following Hegel, first of all because "Kant and the empirical standpoint of modern science" are not criteria which he leaves unquestioned elsewhere (but for a positive estimate of Kant see our chapter on "The Limits of Reflexive Philosophy"); and also because the demise of God's saving presence in history would merit, one would have thought, a little more than half a sentence, especially in view of Gadamer's "optimism" (for which see our chapters on Eschatology and on Providence below).

(WM 437; TM 418) Gadamer claims to be only following "the necessity of the thing itself /der Sache/" when he is led by his critique of modern aesthetics and historicism to transcend the "objectivity" of Cartesian "subjectivism" towards an interdependence of subject and object which comes close to the insights of classical metaphysics. (ibid.) But in contrast to Greek thought and to German Idealism, Gadamer says he is thinking "from the centre of language." (ibid.)

The sort of "participation" which Gadamer envisages is, however, very different from what is found in the metaphysical tradition. It no longer designates "a teleological relatedness of mind or spirit to the essential structure of beings". (WM 437; TM 419) Nevertheless Gadamer believes there is a genuine analogy between the metaphysical doctrine of "participation" and his understanding of the "eventual" character of Understanding. Just as metaphysical "participation" is expressed in "dialectic" which is the movement of Being itself which thought experiences, so for Gadamer Understanding is a relation in which the content of tradition becomes "an event", comes-to-presentation, in the hermeneutical experience. The consciousness of the interpreter is not in control of the hermeneutical situation; it is tradition that has the real initiative, for it is the word of tradition that encounters us. The activity of the interpreter is merely a response to the prior address of tradition. Indeed we must really speak here of the activity of "the thing itself" /das Tun der Sache selbst/. (WM 439; TM 421) By this is meant that the interpreter is not in a position to pick and choose in advance his hermeneutical objects; he must in a literal sense take what comes. Interpreting consciousness does not have the freedom to detach itself from the hermeneutical situation in order to

survey the field of possible objects, some of which it may subsequently decide to engage with. For interpretation cannot unmake the event that it itself is /Das Geschehen, das sie ist, kann sie nicht ungeschehen machen/. (WM 439; TM 420) Gadamer plays on the etymological connection between "participation" or "belongingness" /Zugehörigkeit/ and hearing /Hören/ in order to suggest the dependency of interpretation on the prior address of tradition, as well as the essentially linguistic character of the process.

With this concept of the activity of "the thing itself" Gadamer believes himself to be drawing near to Hegel and the Greeks. Gadamer compares his own critique of modern methodology with Hegel's critique of "external reflection" (WM 439; TM 421), in which the subject, with its illusion of self-sufficiency, deals with its objects in a merely external way. The true method is, according to Hegel, the activity of "the thing itself". (ibid.) This does not deny that philosophy has its own kind of activity, which Hegel calls "the strenuous effort of the Notion" /die Anstrengung des Begriffs/.[5] This effort consists in not interfering arbitrarily, or with insights gleaned elsewhere, in the "immanent rhythm of the Notion".[6] In Gadamer's view, hermeneutics also has its own kind of "strenuousness", the effort of "being negative towards oneself". (WM 441; TM 422) The authentic hermeneutical attitude of "persistent listening" /unbeirrtes Hören/ has to discipline itself to hold at arm's length all expectations of meaning that have been rejected by the text. (ibid.) The experience of having our

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[5] PS 35 (HW II 44).

[6] PS 36 (HW II 45).

expectations of meaning and the prejudices they derive from overthrown by "the thing itself", the subject-matter of the text, corresponds, Gadamer believes, to "the authentic experience of dialectic". (ibid.) We only have to think of Plato's "dialectic" which Gadamer claims is first and foremost the art of conducting a dialogue in such a way that our false opinions are revealed and our eyes are opened to "the thing itself" - the most famous example of this process being Socrates' dialogue with the slave-boy in the Meno. (WM 440; TM 421f) However dialectic is not restricted to this sort of pedagogical dialogue, but belongs to the essence of that kind of thought which alone allows the nature of "the thing itself" to emerge. (WM 440; TM 422) Plato fuses the Socratic art of dialogue with Eleatic dialectic and in his Parmenides raises the latter "to a new reflective level". (ibid.) That things change into their opposite when we attempt to think them through logically is the experience of thought to which Hegel also appeals. Now the hermeneutical experience, Gadamer insists, is not an experience of thought in the same sense as this sort of dialectic of the Concept or Notion which claims to free itself from the power of language. (ibid.) Nevertheless, Gadamer claims, there is in the hermeneutical experience something like a dialectic /so etwas wie eine Dialektik/, an activity of "the thing itself", an activity on the part of the interpreter which, in contrast to the methodology of modern science, is a passivity /ein Erleiden/. (WM 440f; TM 422)

This "something like" /so etwas wie/ must not be allowed to slip by unnoticed. What for our purposes is important is not that there are some resemblances between Gadamer's dialectic and metaphysical dialectic. Our concern is rather with what precisely is the

nature of the relation between the two sorts of dialectic, and with what is the significance of this relation if and when it has been clarified. We have already in this chapter referred to the apparent ambiguity of Gadamer in this regard. There we asked whether Gadamer could in any genuine sense be said to be giving the "truth" of metaphysical dialectic in his own form of dialectic. Does Gadamer not perhaps merely give the appearance of re-presenting the truth, old yet ever new,[7] of metaphysics? Does not the new wine trampled out by Nietzsche and Heidegger burst open the old wine skins of metaphysics? Do not Gadamer's attempts to patch up the rotting fabric of traditional metaphysics only make the damage worse than before? It is beyond our present scope to attempt to answer these questions. However since the metaphysical tradition which Gadamer wants to re-present is inextricably interwoven with the Christian tradition, we must ask of him at a later stage parallel questions concerning the relation of his philosophy to the Christian tradition.[8]

Before moving on to Gadamer's concept of "the speculative", there is one further point concerning his dialectic which must be made. For Gadamer what is "dialectical" about interpretation is not so much the fact that the one-sidedness of each statement must be balanced by a statement from another perspective. (WM 441; TM 423f) This, Gadamer says, is a secondary phenomenon (ibid.), and one which is well known to Schleiermacherian hermeneutics. (WM 447; TM 429) The phenomenon which according to Gadamer is "really" dialectical is more radical than this. It is the phenomenon in which "the word

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[7] cf. KS III 88.

[8] See Part Two, passim.

which interpretratively meets the meaning of the text brings to language the whole of this meaning; that is, it itself allows an infinity of meaning to come to finite presentation". (WM 441; TM 423) This is the understanding of dialectic which we have already met with at the beginning of this chapter. The question we must ask is whether this understanding of dialectic is not so radical that it undermines the task that has traditionally belonged to dialectic, that is, of mediating the immediacy of Being "in itself". Dialectic is the process which, from Plato to Hegel, allows the transcendent[9] First Principle of reality to come to expression. We suggested above[10] that Gadamer goes the way of dialectic in order to give Heidegger's ontological insights, his experiences with Being, expression in the logic of the particular sciences, specifically the human sciences. These sciences are concerned with particular, determinate beings; it is ontology alone which is concerned with Being itself, with Being as such. Gadamer's project can be seen especially clearly in his attempt to guarantee ontic truth or correctness in terms of the ontological truth which is "language itself".[10] We had doubts about the success of Gadamer's attempt, but noted that such success as he might have depends on his use of dialectic to mediate the immediacy of ontological truth into the realm of ontic correctness. But whereas Hegel's dialectical mediation depends on the elaboration of "the totality of the determinations of thought", Gadamer expressly relegates such a concept of dialectic to "a merely secondary phenomenon".

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9 Though this transcendence, which we see above all in Republic 509 and in Plotinus, tends to be toned down in Hegel. cf. Chapter 5(c) below.

10 See Chapter 7 above.

Dialectic for Gadamer is not primarily to do with the elaboration of truth in statements, but with that prior process or event in which the content of tradition first "comes to language". It is only in this "coming-to-language" that the content of tradition means anything (i.e. is at all). Thus we might say that for Gadamer dialectic is the "ontological event" par excellence. But if dialectic is itself the "ontological event", it is very difficult to see how it can also perform the function of mediating the immediacy of the "ontological event" in the logical realm of determinate beings. If dialectic is primarily to do with the fact that the contents of tradition come-to-language (i.e. are at all), it is very difficult to see how it can also perform its traditional task which is logically to unfold what is there. The onus is on Gadamer to show how his new concept of dialectic relates to the traditional concept. He must allay our fears that his transformation of dialectic into an "ontological event" not only empties the term of its traditional meaning, but also prevents it from fulfilling its traditional function - a consequence which casts doubt on Gadamer's ability to move beyond Heidegger's ontology to the logic of the human sciences. Unfortunately Gadamer does not, in the present writer's view, do enough to show that these fears are groundless.

(c) "The Speculative"

Gadamer proposes to explicate his own understanding of dialectic, as opposed to metaphysical dialectic, by introducing the concept of "the speculative". (WM 441; TM 423). With this term, which was much used by Hegel, Gadamer wishes to indicate that which the metaphysical and his own hermeneutical dialectic have in common. (ibid.) Gadamer begins by giving a description of the phenomenon of mirroring, for this phenomenon is what the word "speculative" originally refers to. (ibid.) Something is mirrored in something else, for example a castle in a lake; the lake then throws back the image of the castle. The mirror image has no being-for-itself; it is like an appearance which does not itself exist and which lets a view of the mirrored object appear. The real mystery of mirroring is "the intangibility of the image, the unearthly quality of sheer reproduction" /die Ungreifbarkeit des Bildes, das Schwebende der reinen Wiedergabe/. (ibid.) "Speculative", as the word was coined by philosophers around 1800, is based on this phenomenon of mirroring. (ibid.) A person or thought which is speculative is opposed to "the dogmatism of everyday experience" (ibid.), where everything is locked into the fixed determinateness that allows it to be what it is and nothing else. In contrast to this, the "speculative" person is able to reflect, that is, in Hegelian terminology, to recognize the "in itself" as "for me". (WM 442; TM 423) A thought is speculative when the relation it expresses is not merely the attribution of a predicate to a fixed subject, but must rather be thought of as a mirror-relation in which that which mirrors is the pure appearance of that which is mirrored, so that "the one is the one of the other, and the other is the other of the one". (ibid.)

This "speculative relation" of thought is described by Hegel in the Preface to this Phenomenology of Spirit where he differentiates between the structure of the "speculative sentence" and the subject-predicate structure of the proposition or judgement.[1] The "speculative sentence" (the examples Hegel gives are "God is Being" and "the actual is the universal") has the subject-predicate structure of the proposition or judgement only in appearance. In reality the "predicate" turns out to be, not a quality attached to a fixed subject, but rather the essence of the subject. The normal movement of thought is as it were blocked; it has to reconsider and to keep re-reading the sentence until it grasps its "speculative structure."[2] According to Gadamer in his essay "The Idea of Hegel's Logic"[3], it is Hegel's intention that the "speculative sentence" should demand "a retreat of thought into itself" (HD 66; HD(ET) 95). It is beyond our present scope and competence to examine Hegel's difficult pages on the "speculative sentence", and indeed to examine the account which Gadamer (who never errs on the side of over-simplification!) gives of them. We must simply sketch out the main points that have a bearing on Gadamer's argument.[4] It is important for Hegel that this inner blocking of ordinary thought-processes be expressed, be "set forth" (as Miller translates, PS 39); the speculative relation must, Gadamer

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1 See PS 36-41 (HW II 46-51).

2 This, Hegel tell us, is why philosophy is so difficult to read, and why it must frustrate ordinary ways of thought.

3 HD 49-69; HD(ET) 75-99.

4 Gadamer has, in any case, a tendency to delight in detailed exegesis for its own sake; and while this habit is often illuminating, it also results in lengthy digressions which impair the onward flow of his argument, of which it could be said that it meanders rather than flows.

tells us, go over into dialectical presentation. (WM 443; TM 425) A merely inner appropriation of speculative truth is not enough; as Findlay puts it in his analysis of Hegel's text:

> Speculative dialectic does not merely dispense with the fixed distinctions of argumentative thought in some high flight of insight. It shows them breaking down as it reflects on the intrinsic sense of propositions.[5]

This "express presentation" of the break-up of ordinary thought is the authentic form of philosophical proof. Once proof loses this connection with dialectic, Hegel tells us, there is an end of philosophical proof.[6] Thus proof is not an activity of argumentative /räsonnirend/ thought with its chains of deductive reasoning; proof is rather the activity of the "thing itself", the subject-matter, which with its "immanent rhythm" emerges from the spectacle of the dialectical break-up of inadequate modes of thought. But for Hegel this dialectical presentation is in truth not really external, Gadamer tells us; it only thinks it is as long as thought does not yet realize that in the end it turns out to be the reflection of "the thing itself", the subject-matter, into itself. (WM 444; TM 425) It is only, we might say, until thought realizes that "reality" is not external to it, nor does "reality" reside exclusively within it, but that it itself is a moment of "reality" as the latter relates itself to itself (i.e. becomes a Self), it is only until then that the dialectical presentation of "reality" or the "speculative relation" remains external. Once the level of Absolute Knowledge has been attained, Gadamer tells us, the distinction made in the Phenomenology of Spirit between "speculative" and "dialectical" disappears is "aufgehoben" (ibid.),

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[5] PS 503f.

[6] PS 40 (HW II 50)

since all externality of thought to its subject-matter is overcome.

It is here that Gadamer parts company with Hegel. Gadamer, we may presume, approves of Hegel's idea that thought participates in the dialectical self-presentation of "reality", of "the thing itself". But the idea that this dialectical presentation should be merely a stage on the way to the perfect transparency of self-reflection in Absolute Knowledge can only be rejected by Gadamer. For him it is presumably unacceptable that the need for dialectical presentation should prove to be, after all, merely provisional. Gadamer, however, focuses his critique of Hegel's "Aufhebung" of the difference between dialectical presentation and "the speculative" on the relation to language that this "Aufhebung" implies. Hegel's dialectical method of demonstration which consists in forcing the language of propositions or statements /Aussagen/ into self-contradiction and destruction, as well as his conviction that this process of self-contradiction and destruction can lead eventually beyond language altogether into the realm of pure concepts, presuppose that language is in essence the language of statements. It is above all this presupposition that Gadamer wants to dispute. This assumption about the nature of language Hegel shares with the Greek Logos philosophy, whose intention, Gadamer tells us elsewhere, was to get beyond language altogether.[7] Hegel's dialectic rests, as did Plato's, on the subordination of language to the statement. (WM 444; TM 425) But this assumption, Gadamer affirms, "is in extreme contrast to the essence of the hermeneutical experience and the linguisticality of all human experience of the world". (ibid.)

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[7] See WM 395; TM 377f.

Thus Gadamer refuses to view language primarily in terms of the proposition or statement and to oppose it to "the speculative", allowing it to serve as a merely provisional means of expressing the latter. On the contrary, for Gadamer language has itself something "speculative" about it. (WM 444; TM 426) By this Gadamer does not meant that language instinctively prefigures the reflexive relations of logic, as Hegel thought.[8] (ibid.) Rather the realization of meaning in language is "speculative" "insofar as the finite possibilities of the word are orientated towards the intended meaning as if towards the infinite". (ibid.) This realization of meaning is by no means the same as "making statements". Just how little "making statements" is a real saying of what one means will be clear to anyone who has been involved in legal proceedings where the horizon of meaning which accompanies what is said is excluded with methodological exactitude. The resulting "statements" are inevitably distorted. (ibid.) On the contrary, Gadamer says, "to say what one means, to make oneself understood, means to hold what is said together with an infinity of the unsaid in the unity of one meaning . . . " (ibid.) Even though one uses the most common words, one still speaks "speculatively" when one's words "do not copy beings but express a relation to the whole of Being and let it come to language". (WM 445; TM 426) Even in the most everyday speaking there appears an element of "speculative mirroring"; there is "the intangibility of that which is nevertheless the purest reproduction of meaning". (ibid.) This "speculative" dimension of everyday speech has, Gadamer tell us, something in common with poetry. (WM 445f; TM 426ff)

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[8] For a more detailed discussion of this see HD 63ff; HD (ET) 91ff.

There seem to be two main points in Gadamer's treatment of the "speculative" nature of language which require discussion. First of all, Gadamer's use of the term "infinite" seems to be rather ambiguous; and secondly, his polemic against "the statement" leaves unclear what exactly in his view the status of "the statement" is - or whether it has any status at all.

(i) To deal with the problem of"infinity" in Gadamer it might be helpful to adapt for our own purposes two terms introduced into linguistics by de Saussure: "synchronic" and "diachronic".[9] What we then might call "synchronic infinity" would be the infinite horizon of meaning which accompanies and is implied by every (finite) utterance. While this infinite horizon has no doubt developed in time, while as "World" it is no doubt in some sense "historical", we are here focussing on the fact that it is present, if unexpressed, in the individual utterance. "Diachronic infinity" on the other hand would be the endless mutations of meaning caused by the succession of interpretations in time.[10] No doubt (from Gadamer's perspective) it is artificial to attempt to abstract these two types of infinity; but it nevertheless seems useful to distinguish between "infinity" as implied totality[11] of meaning and "infinity" as the endlessness of the historical process of interpretation.

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[9] It must be stressed that we are not using these terms in a way which precisely conforms with their role in de Saussure's thought (for which see John Lyons, Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics (Cambridge University Press, 1968), p.45ff).

[10] Such mutations could also be caused by cross-cultural interpretation.

[11] The ambiguity of the term "totality" will be discussed shortly.

Now in the present writer's view Gadamer seems to move indiscriminately between these two uses of the term "infinite" which we have distinguished in his text. The "infinity of the unsaid" sometimes seems to refer to the horizon of implicit meaning which accompanies each word or utterance like a penumbra; and sometimes to the endlessness of what has not yet been said and which could be said from different perspectives or horizons of meaning. We might contrast an "inner infinity of meaning" with an "external endlessness of meaning". Gadamer's attempt to re-instate the language of traditional metaphysics on the basis of the second of these uses of the word "infinite" may be given short shrift. To re-introduce terms like "speculative", "infinite", "unity", and "totality" on the basis of what we have called "diachronic infinity" or mere endlessness is, in the present writer's view, disingenuous. It is sheer bad faith to re-instate the dreams of "onto-theo-logy" on the basis of the endless play of temporal flux. Far better would be to go the way of Nietzsche and his followers[12] and openly repudiate the dreams of metaphysics (including "truth", which Nietzsche tells us is "the kind of error without which a certain species could not live"[13]).

Whether the key words of metaphysics might find an authentic re-pristination on the basis of the other kind of "infinity" we characterized as "synchronic infinity" is another matter. That there is a certain kind of language akin to poetry which allows the

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12 i.e. To practise a "hermeneutics of suspicion" rather than a "hermeneutics of belief"; see section (b), note 2, of this chapter.

13 The Will to Power, no.493, quoted in Kaufmann's translation of The Gay Science, (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p.172, note 7.

encompassing life-world to reverberate, and which in this sense might be said "speculatively to re-present the infinity of the unsaid", is a much more defensible position. In the present writer's view it might be more appropriate to term such language "evocative" rather than "speculative"; and since that which is evoked - or, to change metaphors, that which is lit up - is Being or "World", we might even speak of "ontologically evocative" language. Such language may possibly justify the use of worlds like "unity", "totality", "infinity", and might certainly lay claim to its own kind of "truth".

(ii) This leads to our second point which is: what is the relation between this "evocative" language and the language of the statement? To this no doubt prosaic question Gadamer appears to give no satisfactory answer. His polemic against the hegemony of the statement gives the impression that the statement is merely a degenerate form of the authentic linguistic relation to the world which is "speculative". And yet, as Pannenberg remarks in his discussion of Truth and Method, Gadamer is not one of those thinkers who tend to oppose the assertive or propositional nature of language to some existentialist communication of purely personal meaning.[14] Gadamer, on the contrary has much to say about the "objectivity" /Sachlichkeit/ of language.[15] Pannenberg even thinks he has caught Gadamer out when the latter speaks of the process which enable particular realities to become the content of a statement.[16] It must be

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[14] Pannenberg, op.cit., p.143f (Basic Questions I, 125f).

[15] Pannenberg, op.cit., p.145f (Basic Questions I, 127f); cf. WM 421f; TM 403f.

[16] ibid.

noted (in Gadamer's defence) that in the passage concerned he is distinguishing the (good) "objectivity" /Sachlichkeit/ of the Greeks from the (bad) "objectivity" /Objektivität/ of modern science which reduces the dignity of the "thing" to a mere object /Gegenstand/. Pannenberg's discussion misses the importance for Gadamer of Greek thought as a way out of our contemporary impasse. But Pannenberg is correct (in the present writer's view) in pointing to the ambiguity of Gadamer's position with regard to the role of the statement.

Pannenberg's response to Gadamer's ambiguity is to reject the latter's attempts to devalue the statement, these attempts being incompatible with the fact that Gadamer is (in Pannenberg's view) a Hegelian malgré lui.[17] It is Pannenberg's view that the proper task of hermeneutics is not to dissolve the distorting categories of the statement into the more fluid play of "speculative" language with its "infinity of the unsaid". On the contrary that task is for Pannenberg to "turn into statement that which accompanied the original statement as unspoken".[18] In a deliberately provocative gesture Pannenberg declares the goal of hermeneutics to be the objectification /Objektivierung/ of the text in all its implications[19]. However Pannenberg's suggestion that the logic of Gadamer's argument leads to the above conclusion perhaps fails to take sufficient account

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[17] Pannenberg, op.cit., p.146 (Basic Questions I, 129).

[18] Pannenberg, op.cit., p.144 (Basic Questions I, 126f).

[19] ibid., especially footnote.

of the extent to which Gadamer is committed to Heidegger's view that hiddenness is not a contingent privation of truth, but its essential accompaniment. This means that for Gadamer "the unsaid" is not that which we have not as yet said and, as finite human beings, are perhaps incapable of ever saying; for Gadamer "the unsaid" accompanies the said in principle, and it is only through the former that the latter can be said at all, can be at all. Here we come upon an apparently irreconcilable conflict. On the one hand, there is the Hegelian implicit totality which every statement points to; the elaboration of this totality into Absolute Knowledge may, in contrast to Hegel, be rejected as a human possibility, as is the case with Pannenberg. But Pannenberg remains nevertheless in some sense a Hegelian in that he believes that such an elaborated totality may be known at the End of history. We finite beings may not know the totality now (though we may provisionally anticipate it); the totality nevertheless is real enough and knowable - if only by the Divine Knowledge in which we may share in the End. The Heideggerian implicit totality[20] is however itself in some sense finite and in principle unknowable. Finitude is construed by Heidegger in an "ontologically positive"[21] manner, i.e. finitude is the condition of the possibility of Being and truth, not a human attribute which (temporarily?) denies us access

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[20] The "totality of involvements" /Bewandtnisganzheit/ which was briefly discussed in the previous chapter.

[21] PH 215; cf. Gadamer's introduction to the Reclam edition of Heidegger's Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes, p.105.

to them. Moreover for Heidegger this totality is not something which we could construct out of statements, for it is absolutely prior to the secondary and derivative role of statements (or "apophantic logic"). While in the earlier Heidegger the relation of this prior totality to language is not clear (beyond the simple contrast with "apophantic" or propositional logic), in his later writings it becomes increasingly clear that this prior totality is by no means beyond language (which in that case would be reduced to the language of statements) but rather is intimately connected with a primordial, poetic Saying.

Now this primordial, poetic Saying clearly lies behind Gadamer's notion of "speculative" language or, as we preferred to call it, "ontologically evocative" language. The problem is that Gadamer wants to extend the range of this language beyond the purely ontological concerns of Heidegger. As we have repeatedly stressed, Gadamer's intention is to overcome the dangerous isolation of philosophy (which for Heidegger is ontology) from the sciences in Heidegger.[22] But we must ask: is this "ontologically evocative" language the appropriate language for the sciences? Do not the sciences (and even the human sciences) have to be elaborated precisely in statements? Gadamer of course would deny that this is so. But while "speculative" or "ontologically evocative" language may well be the language of great literary and religious texts, one wonders to what extent it would be said to be the language of the human sciences in general (and even of the disciplines concerned with literary and religious texts). To this extent Pannenberg's claim

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[22] cf. KS III 200; PH 196.

that interpretation is the elaboration of the content of texts in statements seems to be justified. On the other hand, to treat a literary or religious text (e.g. the New Testament) merely as a collection of statements is to miss the point. If there is such a thing as "ontologically evocative" language then clearly parts of the New Testament are examples of it; they light up our relation to Being, to "ultimate reality". What is said in this "speculative" language can be communicated in preaching or in liturgy, which can also be examples of "speculative" language. But we can also attempt to express Christian faith in statements or propositions about matters of fact, and these have other criteria of truth (or perhaps we should say "of correctness") than the authority with which "speculative" language imposes itself upon us. This latter undertaking would be called "theology", or perhaps, in some sense of that ambiguous phrase, "philosophy of religion".[23]

The above example of the relation of the New Testament to preaching and liturgy on the one hand and to theology and philosophy on the other perhaps raises more problems than it solves. The point

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[23] We are pleading here for the possible co-existence of an "ontologically evocative" language of faith which makes an immediate and total claim on us and which "relates" us to "the ground of Being"; and a language which elaborates in statements or propositions the meaning of that faith in terms of particular, determinate beings, events and experiences. Faith, that is, involves not only a moment of sheer transcendence beyond the World, a moment in which we are "related" to the groundless ground of the totality of beings, to "the ground of Being"; it is also concerned with the immanent work of the Spirit <u>within</u> the World or totality, with the work of the Spirit in particular events and experiences. These events and experiences may symbolically or poetically evoke the totality, and our "relation" to the ground of that totality; but unless they can also be expressed in "objective" statements which can be true or false, we are arguably not taking our faith with ultimate seriousness. cf. Part Two, Chapter 6 below.

we have been trying to make is that Pannenberg's Hegelian approach seems to be saying something important and true (i.e. that the elaboration of concrete matters of fact in statements is important); and that Gadamer's Heideggerian approach also says something important and true (i.e. that there is a different sort of language which evokes our "relation" to Being). But each of these positions is, in the present writer's view, one-sided; it cannot do justice to the aspect of truth pointed to by the other. This raises the question whether the two positions are irreconcilable, or whether after all there might not be some way of combining them.

To ask this question is ultimately to ask about the relation between Hegel and Heidegger. Are the insights which lie at the heart of their respective philosophies as flatly opposed as they appear to be? Or might it be possible to do justice to both? Such a question is of course enormously complex, and it would be foolish indeed to rush in where angels and professional philosophers fear to tread. However the fact that Gadamer's philosophy in its own way attempts to mediate between Hegel and Heidegger prompts us to risk some comments on this issue. First of all, we must ask to what extent Heidegger's question of Being is dependent on his doctrine of the pre-logical, ontologically finite "life-world". Put another way, to what extent is the question about the totality of beings dependent on the internal structure of that totality? Would not "the wonder of wonders" that an implicit totality of beings <u>is at all</u> persist even if that totality were to be conceived along Hegelian lines rather than Heidegger's more pragmatic lines (where "beings" are foci of pre-logical "involvements" or relations

of meaning rather than objects of statements)? A Hegelian implicit totality can remain as unknown and inaccessible as Heidegger's implicit totality ever was - only it is so because human beings are in fact finite, and not because that totality is in principle finite. No doubt such thoughts are heresy from a Heideggerian point of view, since his "ontologically positive" understanding of finitude is as fundamental a theme as his question about Being. But this does not prevent us from asking in what sense these two themes are actually dependent on each other.

Of Hegel, on the other hand, we must ask whether his logical totality does not permit of being grounded in the unfathomable depths of the Godhead to which the mystical tradition testifies. Can God be enclosed within the realm of reason, of logic and of essence? Is there not some truth in the ancient idea that reason (nous) is only a moment in the Divine Life?[24]

The direction of our questions to Heidegger and to Hegel is not hard to grasp. They envisage the possibility that Heidegger's sensitivity to the question of Being (and to the "ontologically evocative" language that illumines Being) may be combined with some sort of Hegelian implicit totality of beings which is capable, in principle if not practice, in the End if not now, of being elaborated into a meaningful whole. That whole which is provisionally anticipated (or in religious language "hoped for") would be the ultimate criterion for the truth (or correctness) of the statements we make about determinate beings, events and experiences, about "objective" matters of fact. Perhaps our suggested cross-fertilization of Hegel and

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[24] For more on this topic see Part Two, Chapter 5 below.

Heidegger would produce a still-born monster; perhaps it is "speculation" in the worst sense of that term. It certainly is a union which at least one of the parties, Heidegger, would have rejected most vehemently. But on the other hand, our study of Gadamer has suggested that a rapprochment on Heidegger's terms does not work; Heidegger's notion of ontological truth cannot, we suggested, on its own guarantee the truth (or correctness) of statements. Yet as Pannenberg points out, Gadamer is well aware of the need to hold ont to some form of "objectivity". Gadamer wants to retain in some form or another the truth contained in the metaphysical concepts of logic, dialectic, and the concrete "what-ness" of particular entities (essence). But Heidegger's ontology on its own, we suggest, does not allow for these. Only some such synthesis as we suggested above would seem to allow room for both aspects of truth. Of course such a synthesis may not in fact be possible - Hegel and Heidegger may be simply incompatible. But that, we suggest, does not augur well for philosophy, for we should end up with either a Hegelian or a Heideggerian position which in incapable of doing justice to the insights of the other. For theology too such a situation would be unwelcome, since, as we shall argue below, the philosophical insights of Hegel and of Heidegger correspond to different aspects of the

Christian-Platonic tradition.[25] The impetus to combine the insights of Hegel and of Heidegger does not derive from some tendency to philosophical syncretism, but rather from the inner necessity of the tradition which has been the great vehicle of truth in the West.

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[25] Many, particularly in the English-speaking world, would scorn the idea that philosophical truth is to be carved up between Hegel and Heidegger. But all we are saying (and will argue below) is that Hegel and Heidegger seem each to have got hold of a fundamental aspect of the Christian-Platonic tradition (no doubt a controversial claim with regard to Heidegger.) One can of course attempt to reject this tradition, though such an undertaking is very much harder than it might at first seem (on "rejecting tradition" see Chapter 9(c), note 23, below). Unfortunately not everyone has had as clear a vision of what such a rejection involves as did Nietzsche. Karl Marx, from this point of view, was a "left-wing" Hegelian who missed the significance of the dimension of transcendence in the Christian-Platonic tradition to which Heidegger testifies.

CHAPTER NINE

THE UNIVERSAL ASPECT OF HERMENEUTICS

(a) Gadamer's "Hermeneutical Ontology"

We have now reached the final section of Truth and Method which is entitled "The Universal Aspect of Hermeneutics". In this section the "ontological turn" which characterizes Part Three as a whole finds its completion. Much of this final section is concerned with the "retrieval" of the Platonic metaphysics of the beautiful, and to this we shall devote a separate section. However since the opening pages of this final section give a succinct summary of the results which Truth and Method purports to have arrived at, they seem to merit separate treatment. It seems prudent to try to get one final overview of the wood before plunging once more into the trees (and indeed the tangled undergrowth[1]) of Gadamerian exegesis.

Gadamer's reflections have been guided, he tells us, by the idea that language is a centre in which self and "World" meet; or better perhaps, in which they make themselves manifest in their primordial "togetherness" /sich in ihrer ursprünglichen Zusammengehörigkeit[2]

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[1] Already in the 1920's, Gadamer tells us, his friends had coined the term "ein Gad" to designate something which was unnecessarily complicated! See his Philosophische Lehrjahre, p.46.

[2] "das Zusammengehören" is the term used by Heidegger for the belonging together of There-being and Being. This supports a connection between Gadamer's "die Mitte der Sprache" and Heidegger's "einfache Mitte"; see Chapter 8(a), note 2 above. "Zusammengehörigkeit" also echoes "Zugehörigkeit" (belongingness or participation) about which Gadamer has written above.

darstellen/. (WM 449; TM 431) The "speculative centre of language" in which this "togetherness" or unity is made manifest is, in contrast to the dialectical mediation of the concept,[3] always a finite event. (ibid.) Gadamer rehearses the themes which he has presented in the previous section (and on which we have offered some comment): language, with its "speculative structure", is not a copy of a fixed given but is the coming-to-language of a whole of meaning; this process brings us into the vicinity of ancient dialectic which knew of no methodical activity of a subject but rather only of an activity of the "thing itself"/is the authentic "speculative movement" which takes hold of the speaker. (WM 450; TM 431) These themes, Gadamer now tells us, point to "a universal-ontological structure", that is, to the fundamental constitution of anything at all to which Understanding can be directed. (WM 450; TM 432) The universality of the hermeneutical phenomenon is a reflection of the universal truth that all intelligibility is in essence linguistically constituted. (ibid.) Hence we say not only that art "speaks to us" but also that nature "speaks" and indeed that things "speak for themselves".[4] The universal connection of Being and language is, Gadamer tells us, what grounds the curious link between literary interpretation and the study of nature which accompanied the beginnings of modern science (e.g. "the book of nature")[5]. (ibid.) Whatever can be understood presents itself of

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[3] Where self and World are united in the infinite, i.e. in Absolute Knowledge.

[4] This is a rather free rendering of the German idioms Gadamer appeals to here. cf. his essay "The Nature of Things and the Language of Things" (KSI 59-69; PH 69-81).

[5] cf. WM 170, 226f; TM 160, 211ff.

itself as language to the Understanding. (ibid.) This is the by now familiar structure which Gadamer calls "speculative". Coming-to-language does not mean that something acquires a sort of second existence; it is rather the case that that as which something presents itself belongs to its own being. (ibid.) The "speculative unity" of language involves a difference between Being and self-presentation which is no difference at all. (ibid.) Or as Gadamer elaborates:

> What comes to language is certainly other than the spoken word itself. But the word is only a word through that which comes to language in it. In its own physical being the word is only there to be taken up into what is said /um sich in das Gesagte aufzuheben/. Conversely, that which comes to language is not some extra-linguistic entity which is pre-given; rather it only receives its own determinateness in the word.[6]

It is this "speculative" structure or movement characteristic of language at which his critiques of aesthetic and of historical consciousness were aiming, Gadamer tells us. (ibid.) Thus it is this "speculative" structure which holds together the three Parts of Truth and Method. Part One with its critique of modern "subjectivistic" aesthetics ended by rejecting the idea that the work of art has any "being-in-itself" separable from, and comparable with, its contingent reproduction or performance. Such "aesthetic differentiation" of the work "in itself" and its performance is a secondary thematization. (WM 450f; TM 432)

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[6] ibid. The theological student can hardly miss the Christological echoes of this "speculative structure" of language. Nor can he or she fail to notice that Gadamer does not look to Christology for the supreme manifestation of this structure, but rather to the Platonic doctrine of Beauty - a point we shall take up later in this chapter and again in Part Two.

Similarly, Gadamer tells us, the meaning of an historical event or of an historical document is not some fixed object "in itself"; historical consciousness is in reality the mediation of past and present. (WM 451; TM 432) Thus the "speculative" structure of "identity-in-difference" characterizes both aesthetic and historical experience. The movement of Truth and Method as a whole is from the establishment of this "speculative" movement as the authentic structure of aesthetic and historical experience to an explicit concentration on the structure as such which turns out to be the "essence of language". The "speculative" movement is not only the structure of aesthetic and of historical experience; it is also the structure of reality itself, of Being itself. Reality or Being is essentially "speculative", that is, linguistic. Thus Truth and Method moves from an examination of the theories of interpretation operative in aesthetics and the human sciences to an examination of interpretation as the fundamental, ontological process. Interpretation is not merely what we do when we are involved with works of art or historical documents; it is that which makes possible any experience whatsoever of any reality whatsoever. Hermeneutics, as the science of interpretation, is thus no merely ancillary discipline but is of "universal-ontological" import. In Gadamer's own words:

> For the human relation to the world is absolutely and fundamentally linguistic and hence intelligible. Hermeneutics is, as we saw, to this extent a universal aspect of philosophy and not merely the methodological basis of the so-called human sciences.[7]

From this vantage point Gadamer once more rehearses his criticisms of any extension of the methods and ideals of the natural sciences

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[7] WM 451; TM 432f. Gadamer's italics.

beyond their own relatively restricted sphere. The objectifying attitude of the latter and their concept of "being-in-itself" /Ansichsein/ represent an abstraction, an artificial removal from the authentic and original linguistic relation to the world. (WM 451; TM 433) The natural scientific "mind-set" tries to assure itself of beings, to make certain of beings, by a methodical organization of its knowledge, and condemns as heresy all knowledge not susceptible of this sort of methodological certainty.[8] (ibid.) But Gadamer also wants to avoid any merely Romantic reaction to positivism, as well as any idealistic metaphysics of infinity à la Hegel, in whose company, he has argued, Schleiermacher ends up. (ibid.) The "language that things have"[9] is not the logos ousias of the metaphysical tradition and it does not complete itself in the self-intuition of an infinite intellect - it is rather the language which we apprehend in all our finitude and historicality. (WM 451f; TM 433) The linguistic event in which Understanding is repeatedly concretized is finite, Gadamer stresses. (WM 451; TM 433)

Gadamer returns to what he has called the "universal-ontological" aspect of the speculative structure of language in the final paragraph of the passage under consideration. He emphasizes once more that it is no peculiarity of the work of art to have its being in its presentation, nor is it a peculiar characteristic of historical being to be understood in terms of its significance. (WM 452; TM 433f) On the contrary

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[8] For a succinct summary of this transformation of truth into certainty; see the essay "Was ist Wahrheit?", KSI 46-58, esp. p.50.

[9] Apparently a German idiom; see note 4 above.

as Gadamer says in the following sentences which attempt to sum up the vast and intricate tapestry of Truth and Method:

> Self-presentation and being-understood do not only belong together in the interpenetration of the work of art and its "effective-history", of what is handed down in history and its being understood in the present. It is not only art and history that are speculative, each differentiating itself from itself, bringing itself to presentation; it is not only art and history that are language which speaks meaning. These characteristics apply to every being /alles Seiende/ insofar as it can be understood. The "speculative" constitution of Being which grounds hermeneutics is of the same universal scope as reason or language.[10]

The movement of Truth and Method, then,is from an examination of the logic of the human sciences to "language as the horizon of a hermeneutical ontology". The "speculative" structure of hermeneutical experience turns out to be the structure of language and ultimately of Being itself. Gadamer's attempt to blend Heidegger's insights into the ontological significance of language with a revaluation of the metaphysical tradition results in a synthesis which does much to overcome the onesidedness of both. There can be little doubt that Gadamer must be credited with a major philosophical achievement. However there remains the nagging doubt that Gadamer's real contribution is in the end to ontology and not to logic of the human sciences which it was his avowed intention to transform. While Gadamer declares that, in contrast to Heidegger, his real interest is in the consequences of ontology for hermeneutics rather than in ontology itself (WM 250,TM 235),

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[10] WM 452; TM 434. Here is another of those tantalizing references to reason which Gadamer makes from time to time. Unfortunately he nowhere in Truth and Method gives an extended discussion of reason.

it is perhaps a little surprising that his major work should end by discussing a "hermeneutical ontology" rather than an "ontological hermeneutic". This latter phrase which we have coined (or perhaps perpetrated) is intended to suggest the development of the consequences of Heidegger's ontology in the sphere of hermeneutics or the logic of the human sciences. And it does not seem to the present writer that Gadamer has succeeded in presenting a satisfactory "ontological hermeneutic". Perhaps this is because the latter phrase may represent a "square circle". Perhaps it is in the end as impossible to understand hermeneutics or the logic of the human sciences in terms of ontology as it is to understand ontology in terms of logic.[11] We may in the end be left with two complementary dimensions of reality, neither of which is reducible to the other. To these two dimensions of reality would correspond two disciplines:[12] first of all ontology, which would be concerned with Being as such, with the Being of the totality of beings /das Ganze des Seienden/; and secondly logic, taken in the widest sense of that term, which would be concerned with the structure and relatedness of beings in the

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[11] An absurdity which the Western philosophical tradition has spent most of its history trying to perpetrate, according to E. Gilson in his Being and Some Philosophers. Our contention here and below that an adequate understanding of reality demands two complementary disciplines (i.e. ontology and logic), neither of which is reducible to the other, perhaps draws near to the Thomist insistence on the complementarity of Existence and Essence. But it is beyond our present scope and competence to explore this area here.

[12] This is not to say that two such disciplines could not have a reciprocal influence, that each could balance and correct the other. It is only to say that for one to swallow up the other spells philosophical disaster.

totality of beings. To posit these two dimensions is in effect to repeat the suggestion made at the end of the previous chapter that the essential insights of Heidegger and Hegel must somehow both be retained for a satisfactory philosophy. The real contribution of Gadamer may be that he has attempted to do this. Truth and Method may be a continual discussion of the philosophical past; but its real worth may be that it sets the agenda for discussion in the philosophical future.

(b) A Methodological Interlude

On first reading it is perhaps rather startling that Gadamer should choose to finish Truth and Method not with a recapitulation of the general results of his investigation into Understanding in the human sciences, but rather with a detailed exegesis of certain texts of Plato dealing with Beauty. The final overview and summary of arguments which we might expect at the end of a major philosophical text is quickly disposed of in the opening paragraphs of the final section which we have discussed above in section (a) of this chapter. The final section of Truth and Method is largely concerned with an interpretation of Plato. But this peculiarity is not merely a quirk or a failure of nerve on the part of Gadamer; it is rather of considerable methodological significance. Gadamer has, after all, consistently refused any "teleological" elevation of the experience of Understanding into knowledge. Interpretation is by Gadamer's own definition open-ended, and is not "teleologically" related to any final results. In Gadamer's view there is no such thing as one universally and externally "correct" interpretation. Hence in order not to fall victim to the reflexive argument, the power of which he well knows,[1] Gadamer must avoid giving the impression that his own claim that there is no final knowledge is itself being presented as some final knowledge. Gadamer must seek to banish the impression that Truth and Method gives the final, correct interpretation of interpretation. Gadamer's interpretation of interpretation[2] must, to remain true to its own interpretation, end in interpretation

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[1] cf. our chapter on reflexive philosophy above.

[2] Or as de Waehlens puts it in the title of his article cited in Part Two, Chapter 4(a) below, Gadamer's "hermeneutics of hermeneutics".

and not in any theoretical findings about interpretation. And since for Gadamer interpretation is always interpretation of the tradition which comes to us, his own interpretation of interpretation must remain an interpretation of tradition, in this case of the Platonic tradition which in Gadamer's view determines Western thought both positively and negatively. Moreover Gadamer must not appear merely to be giving an ingenious exegesis of Plato which claims to show that Plato has unconsciously stumbled across Gadamer's theory of interpretion, no doubt in a primitive and imperfect version. On the contrary, Gadamer's interpretation of interpretation means that Plato's theory of Beauty must address us across the creative void of time, and must demand to come to presentation for our world in the way it does in Gadamer's text. Initially Gadamer comes to meet the tradition as the spokesman of our age, the age dominated by the methodological ideals of the natural sciences; he comes with the questions of our age, and above all with the question, old yet ever new, about the nature of truth; he comes, as it were, at the invitation of the word of tradition (in this case the Platonic tradition about Beauty) which first comes to him and addresses him, and says, to adapt Isaiah, "Come now, let us reason together". The outcome of this reasoning together is that Gadamer becomes the spokesman of the tradition; it is in his words that the message of tradition

comes to us.[3] In this concrete instance of interpretation, as in all interpretation according to Gadamer, the initiative and priority of tradition must be stressed.

It must be said in Gadamer's favour that, far from leaving us with any abstract theoretical account of interpretation, he leaves us rather with a concrete example of what he understands interpretation to be. Hence Gadamer himself puts the reader in a position where the overall evaluation of Truth and Method depends on how convincing he or she finds the particular interpretation with which Gadamer chooses to end. Of course this interpretation is not an isolated example, since the bulk of Truth and Method has consisted in interpretations of various texts by authors including Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger (to mention only a few). The reader of Truth and Method will no doubt have come to some decision about how convincing he or she finds Gadamer's interpretations long before reaching this final section. The more suspicious reader will wonder about some of the more ingenious interpretations by Gadamer, and will ask whether in reality tradition forces Gadamer's hermeneutical theory onto Gadamer, or whether perhaps Gadamer might not

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[3] The fact that the above lines are reminiscent of the views of the so-called "New Hermeneutic" theologians Ebeling and Fuchs is no coincidence. Gadamer says that his approach has something in common with that of the latter. (WM 313 note 2; TM 526 note 238) However in my B.D. dissertation (Edinburgh University, 1977) I argue that despite his use of certain themes in the later writings of Heidegger (especially the theme of language), Fuchs ultimately adheres (like Bultmann) to the "existentialist" interpretation of Being and Time. He also tends to employ a "law-gospel" schema so that it is "the language of Jesus" alone that saves. On both these issues Gadamer would disagree with Fuchs. Thus Fuchs would be subject to basically the same criticisms that Gadamer levels at Bultmann. See Part Two, Chapter 3 above.

force this fundamental theory onto tradition. He or she may wonder at what point an ingenious interpretation becomes disingenuous.[4] But each case (and the present interpretation of Plato is no exception) must be decided on its own terms. And it is not the least merit of Gadamer that, whether the priority really lies with tradition or with his own preconceived theory of interpretation, he at least forces the reader to come to grips with certain key texts in the Western philosophical tradition. Whether or not Gadamer's interpretation of interpretation is in the end fully convincing, what does convincingly communicate itself is Gadamer's own passion for the art of interpretation. If the reader is thereby driven to a first or a fresh encounter with these texts, Truth and Method has then arguably obtained its goals with more success than any theoretical argument could guarantee. For to read Truth and Method is to undergo an experience which opens up new horizons of meaning; Truth and Method itself has some of that authority which does not need to be supported by theoretical justification, a kind of authority which Gadamer will now explore in terms of Plato's doctrine of Beauty.

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[4] As we have already asked in the previous chapter with regard to Gadamer's interpretation of certain themes in the metaphysical tradition.

(c) Truth and Beauty

Gadamer believes that the "ontological ~~truth~~ turn" taken by his hermeneutical enquiry brings him close the "the metaphysical concept of the beautiful". (WM 452; TM 434) The closing pages of Truth and Method are devoted to an exploration of this closeness he perceives between his own concept of the hermeneutical experience and the metaphysical concept of the beautiful which is particularly at home in the Platonic tradition.[1] The concept of the beautiful, Gadamer tells us, which was eliminated by the nineteenth century critique of classicism, was formerly a universal metaphysical concept.[2] (ibid.) Gadamer has no intention of reviving the last embodiment of this tradition which stressed the metaphysical status of the beautiful, that is, the aesthetics of perfection of the eighteenth century. (WM 455; TM 437) He intends rather to go back to the source itself, to the writings of Plato.

In Plato, Gadamer tells us, the Idea of the beautiful moves very close to that of the Good, insofar as it too is chosen for its own sake, as an end in itself rather than as a means to some other end. (WM 453; TM 435) According to Gadamer there is in Platonic philosophy a

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[1] For the controversy as to whether or not Beauty is a "transcendental" see F.J. Kovach's article under the general heading of "Beauty" in the New Catholic Encyclopedia. Kovach says that inclusion of Beauty as a "transcendental" is characteristic of the Platonic tradition in contrast to the Aristotelian.

[2] C. Putnam in his article under the general heading of "Beauty" in the New Catholic Encylcopedia distinguishes between a metaphysics of beauty and beauty merely as a part of a metaphysical system. The former, he says, has its roots in Plato and receives its decisive metaphysical elaboration in Neo-platonism, and particularly in Plotinus.

close connection between, and not seldom a confusion of, the Idea of the Good and the Idea of the beautiful. (ibid.) Both are beyond all that is conditioned and plural. (ibid.) Gadamer compares the absolute Beauty, which exists "apart and alone",[3] of Socrates' speech in the Symposium (209a-212a[4]) to the Good of which Socrates says in the Republic that it is "beyond being, surpassing it in dignity and power" (509b)[5]. The beautiful "in itself" is as much "beyond all beings" as the Good, Gadamer claims. (ibid.) Gadamer asks whether the move beyond physical beauty to "intelligible" beauty really involves a differentiation and increase in the beauty of what is beautiful, and not merely of the beings that are beautiful. (WM 453f; TM 435) The implication of this question seems to be that Gadamer thinks that transcendent Beauty is immanent in what is beautiful in such a fashion that it is in some sense independent of the particular way in which what is beautiful is ordered or structured. While Gadamer will admit later that it is the order or well-proportionedness of what is beautiful that makes it beautiful,[6] he seems to think that Beauty is not dependent on the order or structure of what is beautiful to the extent that there could be varying degrees of Beauty in proportion to the varying degrees of order and structure of what is beautiful.[7] Gadamer

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[3] See the Penguin translation of the Symposium by Walter Hamilton, p.95.

[4] Wahrheit und Methode gives a mistaken reference (uncorrected in the English translation) to Symposium 310.

[5] Cornford's translation.

[6] See WM 457; TM 439.

[7] Hence Gadamer implicitly rejects any analogical treatment of Beauty, as in, for example, Pseudo-Dionysius, where all things are beautiful by participation in the Beauty of God, by analogy, i.e. in their own way. cf. Putnam, op.cit.

seems to see the difference between what is beautiful and what is not as absolute;[8] there are, apparently, no degrees of Beauty.[9]

However for Plato, Gadamer recognizes, there is a hierarchy of Beauty which is also a teleological hierarchy of Being. (WM 454; TM 435) Beauty appears more purely and more clearly in the intelligible sphere than in the visible, which is marred by that which resists measure and perfection. (ibid.) The basis of this intimate connection of the Idea of the beautiful with the teleological hierarchy of Being is, Gadamer tells us, the Pythagorean-Platonic concept of measure. (WM 454; TM 436) Plato defines the beautiful in terms of measure, appropriateness and good proportion, while according to Aristotle the elements (eidē) of the beautiful are order (taxis), symmetry (symmetria) and clear definition (horismenon).[10] (ibid.) The close connection between the mathematical hierarchy of Beauty and the heavenly hierarchy means that the cosmos, which is the model of all well-orderedness in the visible sphere, is also the highest example of Beauty in that sphere. (ibid.) For the ancient Greeks, Gadamer sums up, measuredness and symmetry are the decisive conditions of Beauty.[11] (ibid.)

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[8] See WM 456f; TM 438.

[9] Just as, it might be argued, there are no degrees of Being in Heidegger's ontology. cf. note 19 below.

[10] Gadamer does not give references, but presumably he is thinking of, among other texts, Philebus 64e, 66a-b; the Aristotle reference is Metaphysics 1078a 36.

[11] That there is another dimension to Plato's theory of the beautiful is a point which will be discussed shortly. It is perhaps worth noting here that this dimension was taken up by Plotinus, who tried to go beyond a narrow conception of Beauty in terms of symmetry (the version Plotinus attacks appears to be that of the Stoics). See Enneads I.6.

This definition of the beautiful, which persisted more or less intact until the nineteenth century, is universal and ontological, says Gadamer, and involves the priority of nature over art. (ibid.) It was only in the nineteenth century that aesthetic questions were posed in terms of art.[12] (ibid.) This development is rooted in a metaphyscial process, Gadamer tells us, a process in which nature loses "the universal, ontological dignity which belonged to the cosmos as the hierarchyof beautiful things." (WM 454f; TM 436) Despite the marginal recognition of the idea of Gestalt in modern science, nature is thought of as formless or as ruled by mechanical laws; and the aim of science is ultimately the domination of nature. (ibid.) In such a context the beautiful will be conceived in terms of the artistic spirit of man.[13] (ibid.)

Gadamer says that he has no intention merely of reversing this development, and of re-instating the last embodiment of the Greek idea of the beautiful, the eighteenth century aesthetics of perfection. (WM 455; TM 437) For him Kant's critique of aesthetic rationalism is

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12 It might be said that the pendulum has now swung to the opposite extreme. Modern aesthetics is concerned with art and tends to play down the concept of the beautiful. cf. Putnam, op.cit.; also J. Stolnitz' article "Beauty" in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

13 cf. Pierre Fruchon's long article, published in four parts, "Herméneutique, Langage et Ontologie: Un discernement du platonisme chez H.G. Gadamer", Archives de Philosophie, vol.36 (1973), 529-568; and vol.37 (1974), 223-242; 353-375; 533-571. All our references below are to vol.37. Some of Fruchon's interpretations are rather controversial, though discussion of them is beyond our present scope. However his characterization of this metaphysical process as a move from "ontocentrism" to "anthropocentrism" is helpful.

convincing, despite Kant's unfortunate fathering of aesthetic subjectivism. (ibid.) In Gadamer's view it is wrong to base a metaphysics of the beautiful solely on the ontology of measure and the teleological hierarchy of Being, to which the "classicism" of the rationalistic "rules of art" ultimately appealed.[14] (ibid.) However the metaphysics of the beautiful must not without more ado be identified with such aesthetic rationalism. (ibid.) If we go back to Plato we discover quite another side to the phenomenon of the beautiful, and it is this "other side" of Plato's doctrine that is of interest to Gadamer's present undertaking. (ibid.)

Gadamer begins his rediscovery of Plato by remarking that however closely Plato linked the Idea of the beautiful and the Idea of the Good, he nevertheless made a distinction between them, a distinction which gave preference to the beautiful. (WM 455; TM 437) As against the sheer intangibility /Ungreifbarkeit/ of the Good, the distinguishing feature of the beautiful is its ability to be grasped. (WM 456; TM 437) It is of the essence of the beautiful that it appears. (ibid.) Referring to Philebus 64e, Gadamer says that when we attempt to grasp the Good itself, it takes flight into the beautiful; in the quest for the Good the beautiful shows itself.[15] (ibid.) Then, referring to Phaedrus 250b-d,

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[14] For "aesthetic rationalism" see Gilbert and Kuhn, A History of Aesthetics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), chapter X ("German Rationalism and the New Art Criticism").

[15] In his early interpretation of Philebus entitled Platos dialektische Ethik, Gadamer is even more explicit: "The beautiful . . . is none other than the Good in a form which can be seen and spoken about . . . . The flight of the Good into the beautiful means more than its ineffability. In this flight the Good withdraws itself in order to show itself". This interpretation is Heideggerian in every sense of the term. It is perhaps worth remarking that in his commentary on Philebus Hackforth makes no comment on this phrase which is so significant for Gadamer.

Gadamer says that whereas models of human virtue (e.g. justice and temperance) are hard to perceive in the world of appearances since they lack any lustre of their own, the beautiful "immediately captivates us" (a phrase Gadamer will make much of). (WM 456; TM 437f) The beautiful has its own radiance, so that we are not deceived by distorted copies as is the case with virtue. (ibid.) In Plato's words, which Gadamer quotes: "for beauty alone this has been ordained, to be most manifest to sense /ekphanestaton/ and most lovely of them all".[16]

It is now that the connections which Gadamer wishes to establish between Plato's doctrine of Beauty and his own "hermeneutical ontology" begin to emerge. For in this anagogical[17] function which the beautiful has for Plato, there becomes visible an "ontological structural element of the beautiful and with it a universal structure of Being". (WM 456; TM 438) The distinguishing feature of the beautiful as against the Good is that it presents itself, it makes itself in its very Being immediately apparent or clear /einleuchtend/. (ibid.) The beautiful has the supreme ontological function of mediating between Idea and appearance, for the Idea of the beautiful is truly present, whole and undivided, in what is beautiful. (ibid.) However much Beauty may be experienced as the reflection of something supraterrestial, it is nevertheless there in the visible world. (ibid.) That Beauty is indeed something "other", something of a different order, is shown

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16 Phaedrus 250d (Hackforth translation). Gadamer translates "ekphanestaton" as "most radiant" /am meisten hervorleuchtend/

17 Clement of Alexandria had already in the second century A.D. distinguished the four possible meanings of a writing: the literal, moral, anagogical and mystical. See Gilbert and Kuhn, op.cit., pp.149f.

by the way it suddenly lights up, and equally abruptly and without transition disappears. (ibid.) If we must speak of a hiatus (chorismos) between the world of the senses and the world of Ideas, says Gadamer, here it is and here it is immediately overcome.[18] (WM 456f; TM 438)

We have already drawn attention below to Gadamer's view that there is an absolute difference between what is beautiful and what is not, that the Idea of Beauty suddenly plays in its full splendour over what is beautiful and then equally suddenly vanishes.[19] It does not seem to the present writer that Plato says in the Phaedrus passage what Gadamer wants to make him say. In particular it does not seem to be the case that Plato says that the Idea of Beauty is for a brief space of time (or beyond time?) entirely present in what is beautiful. If that were so, it is difficult to know what is the meaning of the ascent to Absolute Beauty described in the Symposium. What Plato says in Phaedrus about the special role of Beauty seems quite compatible with the passage in the Symposium; but

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[18] The theological student can hardly avoid remarking that Gadamer here wants to make Plato's doctrine of Beauty perform the function that the Cross plays in the Christian tradition, i.e. of at once displaying and overcoming the gulf between God and man. In view of our ensuing discussion of Gadamer's interpretation of Plato, it is worth pointing out that the Christian tradition has generally held that while Atonement has been effected once and for all and in principle on the Cross, nevertheless complete At-one-ment or Reconciliation must wait until the End when God will be all in all. cf. Part Two, especially Chapter 4 below.

[19] Gadamer's concept of the beautiful seems to owe more to Heidegger's "event /Ereignis/ of Being" than to Plato. Nevertheless, as we suggest in Part Two, Chapter 4, Heidegger is not without his debts to Platonism, whatever he may say against Plato.

what Plato clearly says in the Symposium seems incompatible with what Gadamer tries to make Plato say in Phaedrus. To try and rid Plato's doctrine of Beauty of a hierarchy of Beauty, of degrees of Beauty, seems to go against the plain meaning of the Symposium. This is not to say that there is no place for an elaboration of the aspect of Beauty highlighted by the Phaedrus passage, but only that such an elaboration must remain compatible with the Symposium.[20]

Gadamer now focusses his attention on the radiance of the beautiful to which Plato alludes in Phaedrus. Radiance or "shining forth" /Hervorscheinen/, Gadamer says, is not merely one of the qualities of what is beautiful, but rather constitutes its real nature. (WM 457; TM 439) It is the proportion of a being which does not merely permit it to be what it is, but which also makes it stand out as an internally proportioned whole. (ibid.) However Beauty is not merely symmetry,

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20 Just as the radiance of the beautiful, which Phaedrus points to, is only one element of the beautiful according to mediaeval thought. According to Thomas Aquinas the three elements are: integrity, suitable proportion and clarity. In this he echoes Pseudo-Dionysius for whom (according to Putnam, op.cit.,) the elements of the beautiful are:

(1) the selfhood, identity (tautotes), or perfection that comes from participating, according to one's capacity, in the beauty of God;
(2) the harmony that orders the universe in a hierarchy; and
(3) radiance, fundamentally a spiritual quality, an enlightening of the mind, of which visible clarity is but an image.

but the coming-to-light /Vorschein/[21] itself which rests on it.[22] (ibid.) Beauty is a sort of shining. (ibid.) But to shine is the activity of light which itself only appears /zum Erscheinen kommt/ by shining /scheinen/ on something. (ibid.) Beauty, Gadamer says, has the mode of Being of light. (ibid.) This characteristic structure of light, that is, only to be itself visible by making something else visible, Gadamer calls its "reflexive constitution". With this "reflexive constitution" of light we have clearly returned to the "speculative structure" which in Gadamer's view characterizes language and ultimately Being itself. That light can only really be itself by illuminating an Other (and, if we are to take seriously Plato's analogy in Republic 509b and its Neo-platonic elaboration, that it can do so only by bringing into existence an Other) has unmistakable similarities to the "speculative" structure of language whereby what is imaged in the word only has its being in the word, while the

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21 "Vorschein" is usually used only in set phrases like "zum Vorschein kommen" (to appear, to come to light); it is difficult to translate by any single English word. The following sentence with its play on "scheinen" (to shine or to seem) and "erscheinen" (to appear) is also difficult to translate. However the English translation does not catch the meaning of either sentence very successfully.

22 A point made already by Plotinus, see note 11 above. Plotinus' Neo-platonic concept of the beautiful influenced the Middle Ages via Pseudo-Dionysius. Albert the Great defines Beauty as the splendour of form shining on the proportioned parts of matter. (See Gilbert and Kuhn, op.cit., p.141). Thomas Aquinas himself talks of lux splendens supra formatum, a phrase which Gadamer cites (WM 462; TM 443). But as we emphasized in note 20 above, this lux or claritas, while perhaps the most striking and even most important aspect of the beautiful, is nevertheless only one aspect among others; it is dependent on the others. On the mediaeval doctrine of Beauty cf. Gilbert and Kuhn, op.cit., Chapter V, especially pp.139ff.

word's essential being resides in its bringing-to-presentation that which it images. This structure of language is, according to Gadamer, the structure of Being itself; Being is essentially self-presentation.[23] We have already had hints that the mode of Being of Beauty is analogous to this "speculative structure" when Gadamer talked of the intangible Good being present in the beautiful; for when Gadamer examined the origins of the term "speculative" in the phenomenon of mirroring he spoke of what is intangible nevertheless coming-to-presentation in the image. (WM 441f; TM 423)

Gadamer also pursues the traditional connection between the radiance of Beauty and <u>form</u> or intelligibility. We have already noted some examples of the mediaeval idea of the Beautiful as the light or radiance of form.[24] Gilbert and Kuhn go further and suggest that light and form tend to be identified in mediaeval thought:

> Splendour is not merely a sensuous efflux but a formative and informative energy. Forma est lumen purum. Light and form are identified because light is the finest and highest of substances, the most excellent of elements, as form is the end to which any given thing aspires.[25]

The light which plays on the beautiful is intelligible light. Gadamer writes:

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[23] To put it in Heidegger's terms (which must lie behind much of what Gadamer says on this theme): Being is the Being of beings; but in beings Being shows itself (and hides itself). See <u>Identity and Difference</u>, pp.61f (for German, p.129).

[24] See note 22 above.

[25] Gilbert and Kuhn, op.cit., p.144. On the identification of light and form. cf. note 27 below.

> It is light which first articulates visible things to forms which are both "beautiful" and "good". But the beautiful is not limited to the sphere of the visible. It is the mode of appearance of the Good in general . . . . The light in which not only the visible but also the intelligible realm is articulated is not the light of the sun but the light of the mind /des Geistes/, of nous. Plato's profound analogy /Republic 508a-509b/ already alluded to this, and from it Aristotle developed the doctrine of nous; and following him the Christian thought of the Middle Ages developed the doctrine of the intellectus agens. The mind which unfolds from out of itself the multiplicity of what is thought is present to itself therein. [26]

This radiance or intelligible light does not fall on a form from an external source, Gadamer says a little later; rather it is the nature of the form itself so to shine, so to present itself.[27] What interests Gadamer is the close connection between the appearing or coming-to-light /Vorscheinen/ of the beautiful and the clarity of the intelligible /Einleuchten des Verständlichen/ which is grounded in the metaphysics of light. (WM 458; TM 440) For the development of Truth and Method was from an examination of the mode of Being of the work of art to an

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[26] WM 458; TM 439f.

[27] Without wishing to become embroiled in a discussion of ancient and mediaeval philosophy, an area which is beyond our present scope and competence, it is perhaps worth venturing the following remarks. If we may take Plotinus as a trustworthy guide to Plato (as J.N. Findlay urges we should in his Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines, p.377), then nous is the second principle, the first emanation from the One or the Good; but the Good is beyond nous. This seems to fit in with the Republic passage Gadamer refers to, where the Good is placed beyond knowledge and truth and even Being. Thus while nous is the realm of light, where "light is transparent to light" (Enneads, II.8.4), the source of light is beyond nous. While Gadamer is doubtless correct in saying that intelligible light does not fall on the form from an external source, and while doubtless it is the form that shines, nevertheless the true Platonist would reject the identification of the form of what is beautiful and the source of its radiance.

examination of the mode of Understanding operative in the human sciences; the connection of the beautiful and the intelligible lies at the basis of Gadamer's work. (ibid.)

At this point it is important to try to focus as clearly as possible on Gadamer's overall intention in this final section of Truth and Method. The connection between the coming-to-light of the beautiful and the clarity of the intelligible is of crucial importance to Gadamer first of all because it holds together Truth and Method; and secondly because it allows him, he believes, to draw some important analogies in these closing pages. For if there is an intimate connection between the coming-to-light of the beautiful and the clarity of the intelligible, then according to Gadamer we can use our experience of the beautiful as a model for understanding our apprehension of intelligibility and truth. The experience of the beautiful will then provide the model not only for Understanding in the human sciences, but also for Being as such. There seem to the present writer to be two main questions relating to this project of Gadamer:

(1) The all-important connection between the coming-to-light of the beautiful and the clarity of the intelligible is, in Gadamer's own words, "grounded in the metaphysics of light". How successfully can Gadamer translate this "metaphysics of light" from its (according to him) obsolete ancient and mediaeval form into a satisfactory contemporary form?

(2) Even if he can do this, does this connection necessarily mean that the experience of the beautiful must be the paradigm for all apprehension of intelligibility and truth?

We will conclude our account of Truth and Method by attempting to give some answers to these questions.

(1) According to Gadamer the "reflexive" structure of light (a structure which, as we have seen, is analogous to the "speculative" structure of language and Being), to which the metaphysics of light testifies, "can obviously be detached from the metaphysical picture-thought /Vorstellung/ of a physical-intellectual /sinnlich-geistigen/ source of light in the style of Neo-platonic and Christian thought". (ibid.) Gadamer continues in the next paragraph:

> . . . the metaphysics of light brings out a side of the ancient concept of the beautiful which asserts its legitimacy even when detached from its connection with substance metaphysics and its metaphysical relation to the infinite Divine Mind.[28]

Without wishing to defendthe much-maligned "substance metaphysics" or to return anachronistically to some pre-critical metaphysical theology, nevertheless one finds it difficult to share Gadamer's confidence that the "reflexive" structure of light or the "other side" of the Platonic doctrine of the beautiful can so "obviously" be detached from their context in the body of thought to which they belong. Gadamer tends to contrast two aspects of Platonic thought which, according to Fruchon's exegesis of Gadamer, are the sources of the main current of Western tradition as well as of its accompanying counter-current. These currents are: first of all, that flowing from the Platonic "ontology of measure", the "teleological hierarchy of Being", a current which, according to Nietzsche and Heidegger, ends in the nihilism and technocracy of the modern world; and secondly the counter-current

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[28] WM 459; TM 440

springing from the "other side" of the Platonic doctrine of the beautiful (which we have attempted to sketch out in the preceding pages) and re-emerging in Neo-platonic and Christian mysticism.[29] Gadamer, it seems, wants to reject[30] the main current of the Western tradition and to isolate from it the counter-current in order to base on the latter his own hermeneutical ontology. However the present writer is not at all sure whether such an isolation of the "other side" of the Platonic tradition is possible, or even desirable. Indeed the burden of Part Two of this study will be that rather than the isolation of either current of the Western (i.e. the Christian-Platonic) tradition, the task for the philosophy and the theology of the future will be to do justice to both currents.[31]

To be fair to Gadamer, however, it must be stressed that while he clearly regards as untenable the mainstream of the Western metaphysical tradition, he does not reject it in as outright a fashion as Heidegger for whom the tradition of "onto-theo-logy" or "metaphysics" had to be "overcome".[32] Rather he wants to "retrieve" what is true

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29 cf. WM 461; TM 442f. This passage is quoted in full at the end of Part Two, Chapter 1 below.

30 See note 32 below.

31 While the main current of Western tradition may have forgotten or suppressed the counter-current, with the horrifying results documented by Nietzsche, Heidegger and others, the answer does not seem to be simply to reverse this process and to reject the main current. Certainly Gadamer is much less prone to do this than Heidegger, but he still seems to the present writer to err in that direction.

32 Of course Heidegger did not think he could reject the Western metaphysical tradition as if it were an object he could simply choose to accept or reject. Rather he talks of a "leap" out of that tradition into a way of thinking as yet unthought, as well as of a "retrieval" of what is "unsaid" in the tradition. But Heidegger's "retrieval" of tradition is much more a "destruction" of that tradition than Gadamer's. cf. BT, section 6, pp.41ff; also Fruchon, op.cit., pp.564ff.

in the metaphysical tradition, as we saw in the previous chapter. Not only does he wish to "retrieve" the radiance of the beautiful that constitutes the "other side" of the Platonic tradition, he also wants to "retrieve" the intelligibility of that light or radiance. While rejecting the "teleological hierarchy of Being" and the "ontology of measure" which constitutes the mainstream of the Platonic tradition, he nevertheless wants to retain the truth contained in these, that is, the conviction that Being is essentially intelligible, that there is a true correspondence between the human soul and reality. Gadamer rejects the infinite Divine Mind, the nous, the realm of Ideal Forms, but thinks he can preserve the truth these notions point to, that is, the intelligibility of Being, with his concept of language. The infinite Divine Word is rejected, but its truth is preserved by the finite human word.[33] It is the light of the word, writes Gadamer, "that allows everything to emerge in such a way that it is inherently clear /einleuchtend/ and inherently intelligible /verständlich/". (WM 458; TM 440) We can see this connection of light and the word, Gadamer thinks, in Augustine's interpretation of the Genesis Creation narrative where Augustine notes that God speaks for the first time when light is created; God does not speak at the first creation of heaven and earth, and this creation is significantly described as being without form. Augustine interprets this to mean that this first

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[33] cf. the essay "The Nature of Things and the Language of Things", where he writes: ". . . the task of metaphysics continues, though as a task that cannot be solved as metaphysics, that is, by going back to an infinite intellect". There is a way however, Gadamer continues, "the way of language". (KSI 64; PH 75).

speaking of God is the coming into being of intelligible light through which the differentiation of formed things is possible, says Gadamer. (WM 458f; TM 440) Gadamer thinks this passage in Augustine is "a first hint of that speculative interpretation of language which we developed in the structural analysis of the hermeneutical experience of the world, according to which the multiplicity of what is thought first proceeds from the unity of the word". (WM 459; TM 440)

Without becoming involved in the discussion of the complex and contraversial topic of Augustine's doctrine of Illumination, it is to be remarked that the jump from Augustine's association of God's Word with the origin of intelligible light to Gadamer's association of the finite human word with the origin of the intelligibility /Verständlichkeit/ of "World" seems a very large one indeed to any but the most convinced Gadamerian. We have given examples in the previous chapter how Gadamer likes to claim that he is giving "the truth" of some traditional metaphysical concept. Here he seems to be claiming that the "speculative" structure of language which he has described is what really guarantees the doctrine of the intelligibility of Being which is the nugget of truth in the worthless remains of metaphysical speculation on the infinite Divine Mind or nous. The intelligible form on which the radiance of Beauty plays is given by the finite human word.[34]

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[34] Hence Gadamer stresses the priority of language even in non-linguistic art-forms like sculpture, painting and even music. To the extent that these are at all meaningful (and if they cease to be that, they cease to be works of art) they presuppose language, Gadamer says. (WM 376f; TM 360f).

At this point the present writer must confess that what Gadamer is attempting to do here is so complex, and his text so allusive (and, it must be said, so sketchy), that it is beyond his present scope and capacity to give it the detailed critical analysis it requires. He has a suspicion, however, that Gadamer does not do justice to the role of form in the traditional doctrine of Beauty, and that his attempt to replace the form and intelligibility conferred by the infinite Divine Mind or nous with the intelligibility of language is not entirely successful. As we suggested in the previous chapter, the "speculative" structure of language is an ontological first principle and does not guarantee intelligibility in any given case. "The Word" or "language" in this sense seems to have something in common with the source of light in Neo-platonic metaphysics where this source is an ontological first principle. But this Neo-platonic first principle must generate a second principle, that of nous, in order to shine forth; this is demanded by the structure of light to which Gadamer himself appeals.[35] But if Gadamer's concept of language corresponds to the ontological first principle, the source of light, it is difficult to see how it can also do the work of the second principle, traditionally nous, which is the home of intelligibility and form. We seem to see here a pattern we have noted elsewhere, in which Gadamer tries to make what is properly a first (or ontological) principle do the work of a second (or logical) principle.[36] To show that this suspicion is

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[35] See WM 457; TM 439.

[36] Or, as in the case of "dialectic", turns a logical concept into an ontological principle, and still expects it somehow to perform the function it did in the logical realm. See Chapter 8(b) above.

correct would require more arguments than can be given here, and probably a more lucid and detailed exposition than the one Gadamer actually gives. Nevertheless it seems worth recording the present writer's doubt whether Gadamer has managed to retrieve the Platonic doctrine of Beauty in its full sweep, and his suspicion that Gadamer's concentration on the "other side" of Platonism has led him to neglect the more familiar aspect with its emphasis on order, measure, and teleology. If this latter aspect of Platonism has given rise to many evils when detached from its "other side" (evils documented by Nietzsche, Heidegger and their followers), this does not seem a reason to reject it altogether as Nietzsche and Heidegger do, and as Gadamer, despite all his manoevering, seems in danger of doing. It would seem better to give equal emphasis to both sides of Platonism.[37] Nevertheless we owemuch to Gadamer for his drawing to our attention the "other side" of Platonism, and should not be overcritical if, like most thinkers who go against the stream, he seems to overcorrect.

(2) However even if Gadamer could make a satisfactory transposition of the "other side" of the Platonic doctrine of the beautiful and the "metaphysics of light", there still remains the question whether the

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[37] It is interesting to speculate about the connections between Gadamer's two sides of Platonism and Nietzsche's distinction of the Apollonian and the Dionysiac in Greek culture in The Birth of Tragedy. This is not to say that Nietzsche made such a distiction within Platonism (though Plato, with all his artistry, is a not unambiguous figure). But the contrast between the Apollonian dreams of "theoretical man" (typified by Socrates) and the loss of self in Dionysiac intoxication seem in some ways to parallel the contrasts which run through Gadamer's work. Perhaps we are still waiting for an "artistic Socrates". Or perhaps Nietzsche could have found his "artistic Socrates" in Plato himself if only he had looked hard enough.

experience of the beautiful can be the paradigm for all apprehension of intelligibility and truth.

Clearly there are strong similarities between the experience of the beautiful and the hermeneutical experience in terms of which Gadamer has sought to understand Understanding. Like tradition in Gadamer's description of it, what is beautiful as it were takes the initiative and imposes itself on us; there is a real"activity of the thing itself". (WM 460; TM 441) Just as we say that what is beautiful is "clear" /einleuchtend/ and are captivated by it before it has been integrated into the whole of our orientations and evaluations; so we can say that something which is said to us is "clear" or "illuminating" /einleuchtend/, and can assent to it without it being proven or certain, and even when we are unsure how it is compatible with the whole of what we hold to be correct.[38] (WM 460; TM 441f) What the experience of the beautiful and the hermeneutical experience have in common is that they are both genuine experiences in the sense that they claim our assent before they are elevated to the status of certain knowledge; any such elevation is for Gadamer impossible in principle for human finitude. (WM 460; TM 442) Both kinds of experience presuppose human finitude, says Gadamer; for an infinite Spirit

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38 That Gadamer's reading of the metaphysical concept of the beautiful is accurate in this regard is given independent confirmation by Gilbert and Kuhn, who write: "When St. Thomas defines beauty he seems to emphasize the immediacy of its apprehension. There is no waiting for analysis, no labour of proof. Sight is enough. 'Clarity', it has been well said, 'is for beauty what evidence is for truth'". Gilbert and Kuhn, pp.144f; their quotation is from de Wulf's Philosophy and Civilization in the Middle Ages, p.29.

presumably both the experience of the beautiful and the hermeneutical experience would not be possible, nor would philosophy itself, as Plato pointed out (Symposium 204a). (WM 460f; TM 462) The fact that we can refer to Plato in this context, Gadamer says, is because of the "other side" of the Platonic doctrine of the beautiful which has accompanied the mainstream metaphysical tradition like an undercurrent and has emerged in Neo-platonic and Christian mysticism. (WM 461; TM 442f) The affinity between Plato's doctrine of Beauty and Gadamer's universal hermeneutic is due to the continuity of this tradition, Gadamer says. (WM 461; TM 443)

Gadamer goes on to indicate the consequences of this connection between the coming-to-light of the beautiful and the clarity of the intelligible for the problem of truth. Just as for Plato the Idea of Beauty was entirely present in what is beautiful,[39] and the gap between appearance and reality was overcome, so for Gadamer the presentation and/or the interpretation of an art-work are not to be differentiated from the work "in itself"; they are the true being of the work. (WM 462; TM 444) In the present author's own words, truth seems to be for Gadamer the identity-in-difference[40] of the work of art and our interpretation, an identity-in-difference which is prior to any critical activity on our part, and which, far from being established by us as autonomous subjects, actually imposes itself on us

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[39] According to Gadamer, that is; the present writer has doubts. cf. note 19 above.

[40] This phrase, which belongs to the vocabulary of British Neo-Hegelianism, is not one which Gadamer himself uses. But it seems to the present writer to express the "speculative" relation about which Gadamer has so much to say.

from itself. This "activity of the work itself" which draws us as participants into the process of its coming-to-presentation is compared by Gadamer to the game. And just as to detach ourself from unselfconscious immersion in the game is to spoil the game, so to try and establish the "truth" about the presentation of an art-work from a detached critical distance is to spoil its real truth, a truth which consists in the very event of its coming-to-presentation in our interpretation of it. All that has been said in the above about the art-work applies also to tradition, and ultimately, Gadamer believes, to Being itself. The medium in which the art-work, tradition, and ultimately Being itself come-to-presentation is language; it is the "speculative" structure of language, its "identity-in-difference" structure, which allows all of the above mentioned to bring themselves to presentation in finite human interpretation.

What is said above will by now be familiar to the reader. What is new in these final pages is the way Gadamer weaves together these familiar themes with elements taken from the Platonic doctrine of Beauty. We have already attempted to give some critical discussion of these themes,[41] and there would be little point in repeating this. Moreover these final pages give even less in the way of argument than is usual for Gadamer; they are something of a "tour de force" in which he weaves together the themes of the book as a whole in passages

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[41] See especially Chapter 7 above.

which are as allusive as they are sometimes elusive. The section has itself something of that illuminating and captivating quality which it claims is the distinctive feature of both Beauty and Truth. Its style is evocative rather than demonstrative, and it proceeds by analogy and metaphor rather than by rigorous argument.

But however illuminating we may find these pages of Gadamer, and however much we may feel that they present a true insight into the nature of truth which modern thought is in danger of overlooking, nevertheless we must wonder whether such an understanding of truth is sufficiently broad as to embrace all human apprehension of truth. Just as Gadamer has emphasized one side of Plato's doctrine of Beauty, possibly at the expense of the other, so we may wonder whether he has not over-emphasized one aspect of truth. In the previous chapter we suggested that while there might well be a place for what we called "ontologically evocative language", there must also be a place for statements of fact. Each of these would have the sort of truth appropriate to it: to the former would correspond the sort of truth that Gadamer has presented in Truth and Method, and especially in these closing pages; to the latter would correspond what we might loosely call the Hegelian sort of truth, truth as totality, a totality in terms of which a particular statement of fact could finally be known to be true.[42] Whether these concepts of truth are compatible or not was discussed to some extent at the

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[42] Such a totality need not of course be available for human inspection in the present as, on one reading at least, Hegel seemed to think it was. It might be, as for Pannenberg, an anticipated totality.

end of the previous chapter. The question will again be raised in Part Two when we discuss the relation between the Platonic/mystical "eschatology of transcendence" and what we have called the "eschatology of consummation" (Chapter 4); and also the relation between play and teleology (or Providence) (Chapter 5). For the present we must content ourselves with observing that Gadamer's presentation of the nature of truth in these final pages accords a special place to poetic truth. But poetic truth is seen as a heightened form of the universal nature of truth. Conversely, all truth is ultimately seen in terms of poetic truth; even statements /Aussagen/ are seen in terms of "the poetic statement";

> . . . the poetic statement proves to be the special case of meaning that has passed fully into, and has been fully embodied in, the statement. Coming-to-language in a poem is like being inserted into an ordered network of relations /Ordnungsbezüge/ which supports and guarantees the "truth" of what is said. To be attested in this way belongs not only to the poetic statement, but in some measure to all coming-to-language.[43]

And according to Gadamer, the presence of what is intuited /das anschaulich Gegebene/ in what is said is just like the presence of the Idea of Beauty in what is beautiful. (WM 464; TM 446)

But however much there may be to recommend in such an attempt to restore the truth-function of poetry and of all language akin to poetry, especially in the face of much modern philosophy and literary criticism, nevertheless it seems dangerous to take poetic truth as the paradigm for all truth. In the final paragraph of Truth and Method Gadamer claims that the sort of truth he has been presenting is the truth

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[43] WM 464; TM 445.

appropriate to the human sciences. (WM 465; TM 446f) He goes out of his way to stress the scientific quality of this kind of truth which transcends method. (ibid.) While the present writer can see the importance of stressing the role of poetic truth in the study of literary and religious texts, he remains unconvinced that poetic truth should also be the sole criterion in the scientific study of historical documents. While Gadamer may be right to resist the domination of poetic truth by scientific method, it nevertheless seems dangerous to allow poetic truth to dominate scientific method. How these two kinds of truth are compatible is beyond our present scope and capacity to say;[44] but to emphasize either one at the expense of the other seems a dangerous step to take, and one which can have unfortunate consequences for the various academic disciplines, including philosophy and theology.

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[44] But see Part Two, Chapter 6(b) below.

P A R T T W O

GADAMER'S PHILOSOPHY AND THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

CHAPTER ONE

THE HERMENEUTICAL EXPERIENCE AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Our first task in Part Two must be to draw together the scattered explicit references which Gadamer makes to the connection between religious experience and his account of the hermeneutical experience. This will serve as a starting point for our contention that Gadamer ultimately grounds his account of Understanding in religious experience. That this grounding is by no means as explicitly discussed as it might be has not only the effect of making the relation between religious experience and philosophical hermeneutics appear rather ambiguous (in a way not dissimilar to the way in which the relation between religion and philosophy in Hegel is notoriously ambiguous); it has also the effect of making Gadamer's account of Understanding seem dangerously abstract, in the sense that how this Understanding can actually be achieved does not seem to be dealt with satisfactorily. "The Speculative" can all too easily seem "merely speculative"; in Christian terms, Gadamer may not yet have considered the great weight of sin.[1] But this is to anticipate. We must first examine such evidence as there is to suggest that for Gadamer there is a connection between religious experience and the hermeneutical experience.

We have already noted above how Gadamer links the attainment of "true experience", which is for him the experience of the unsurmountably finite nature of experience itself, with religious insight, in this case the religious insight which gave birth to Greek tragedy. (WM 339; TM 320)

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[1] cf. Kierkegaard's brilliant critique of "Speculation" in his The Sickness unto Death, trans. by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 150ff.

Aeschylus, according to Gadamer, realized the metaphysical significance of the phrase pathei mathos (learning through suffering) which expresses "the inner historicality of experience". The metaphysical significance of Greek tragedy (as opposed to any reduction of it to a merely aesthetic phenomenon) is also affirmed by an earlier passage in Truth and Method:

> The spectator recognises himself and his own finite being in face of the might of fate. The tragic emotion is not a response to the tragic course of events as such or to the justice of the fate that overtakes the hero, but to the metaphysical order of Being that is true for all. To acknowledge that "this is how things are" is a kind of self-knowledge on the part of the spectator, who emerges with new insight from the illusions in which he lives. (WM 126; TM 117)

As we have seen, according to Gadamer this insight is essentially religious. The general problem of the relation of religious insight to philosophy may be postponed for the moment. What it is important to note here is that the religious insight of Greek tragedy only relates to one aspect of Gadamer's basic philosophical position. It relates to what we might call "the moment of finitude", to Gadamer's contention that human Understanding is radically finite and unable to be elevated to the level of the gods (or of God), to the level of Infinite Spirit and of Absolute Knowledge. What it does not relate to is Gadamer's confidence that despite all human finitude, Being and truth are accessible to human beings inasmuch as the latter let themselves be drawn into the gracious play of the former. Fruchon suggests at the end of his long examination of Part Three of Truth and Method that "for Gadamer the ontology of Heidegger reproduces as it were a tragic theology, in which Being can hold itself back and leave man helpless in the dark."[2]

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[2] Fruchon, op.cit., pp. 570 f.

In contrast to this, Fruchon thinks that for Gadamer the experience of finitude testified to by Greek tragedy "is only the threshold of the revelation of Being and does not ground a tragic ontology. The thought of Gadamer is ultimately rooted in Platonism and Christianity which both, by identifying Being with light and with the reflection in which it never ceases to reveal itself, signify with equal force the death of tragedy."[3] Whether or not we agree with Fruchon's strongly negative reading of Heidegger, there seems little doubt that he is correct when he claims that the place to look for the source of Gadamer's confidence, his "optimism" as de Waelhens calls it,[4] is the Christian and the Platonic traditions.

The clearest statement that there is a fundamental connection between Gadamer's concept of Understanding and religious experience comes in the essay "The Nature of Things and the Language of Things", where Gadamer writes:

> The real concept of self-understanding /i.e. a self-understanding which has overcome modern subjectivism/. . . is not to be thought of in terms of the model of perfected self-consciousness, but rather in terms of religious experience. It is always inherent in the latter that only through divine grace do the false paths of human self-understanding reach their true end, that is, the insight that in all paths one is being led to salvation. (KSI 68; PH 80)

Now this religious insight is rather different from the religious insight which was said by Gadamer to lie at the heart of Greek tragedy. There is a stress in both on human finitude, and on the disastrous consequences of any attempt at human self-determination which disregards the dependency of the human situation. But the nature of this

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[3] ibid.

[4] See passage quoted in Chapter 4(a) below.

dependency is different in each case. In the case of Greek tragedy it is dependency on an indifferent and even hostile fate; in the case of the second quotation religious experience (which here can only mean Christian and/or Platonic religious experience) feels a dependency on a God who "in everything works for good with those who love him." (Romans 8:28) In the latter case the destruction of the self which wants to affirm itself is not merely the tragedy of the human condition; it leads to the liberation of the true self which finds itself in participation in the life of God. It loses itself only to find itself.[5]

That Gadamer's concept of Understanding is related to this kind of religious experience can be seen in the essay "The Problem of Self-Understanding" (KSI 70-81; PH 44-58) when he says that Understanding involves "a moment of loss of self /ein Moment der Selbst-losigkeit/" (KSI 75; PH 51), and that this loss of self is really an enrichment of self:

> . . . and surely the elevation into the dialogue will be experienced not as the loss /Verlust/ of self-possession but rather as an enrichment of self, while we remain all the while unaware of ourselves. (KSI 79; PH 57)

It is true that at this point Gadamer makes no mention of religious experience and connects his account of Understanding rather with the structure of play or the game. One reason for this may be that in this essay, which is intended as a contribution to the theological problem of self-understanding as this emerges from the work of Bultmann, Gadamer prefers to contribute his own model of the game as a way of conceiving Understanding rather than to appeal to the religious experience which is after all precisely the phenomenon to which

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[5] This thumb-nail sketch is intended to refer both to the Christian and to the Platonic traditions, and for the moment ignore the differences between them.

theology with its concept of self-understanding is attempting to do justice.[6] Whether or not this is the case, the experience of loss of self in a game hardly seems interchangeable with the religious experience of grace. Perhaps the confidence with which Gadamer describes Understanding (which is after all There-being's fundamental mode of Being) as the enrichment of self through loss of self could only be grounded in the religious experience Gadamer invokes elsewhere. That there may be analogies between the game and religious experience is not thereby denied,[7] but only that the game is capable of taking the place of religious experience as the ground of a confidence that the "world process" is somehow benevolent and unreservedly to be trusted.[8]

In fact a few pages later in the same essay Gadamer does link the concept of self-understanding back to its theological roots when he writes:

> The self that we are does not possess itself. One could rather say that it "happens". And this is what the theologian is really saying when he asserts that faith is an event in which a new human being is established. He also says that we must believe and understand the Word and that it is through the Word that we overcome the abysmal ignorance about ourselves in which we live. The concept of self-understanding has an originally theological stamp . . . [9]

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[6] For the relation of Gadamer to theology, and to Bultmann in particular, see Chapter 3 below.

[7] In fact, as we will suggest below in Chapter 5, Gadamer's concept of play derives from Heidegger who seems to have owed much to the mystical tradition. It also seems to go back, via the mystical tradition, to the "other side" of Platonism.

[8] cf. Chapter 5 below.

[9] KSI 78; PH 55)

What Gadamer is really saying when he tells us what the theologian is "really saying" is far from clear. Is he in Hegelian fashion giving us the conceptual truth contained in the imaginative form (the "Vorstellungen") of religion? Is he in equally Hegelian fashion rooting his own philosophy in the Christian tradition? At any rate the ambiguity concerning the precise relation of philosophy and religion is certainly Hegelian, as is the ambiguity of the theologian's role caught between the immediacy of religious experience on one hand and the reflexive elaboration of its truth in concepts by philosophy on the other.[10]

A clearer statement of the relation of Gadamer's concept of the hermeneutical experience to the religious tradition of the West, but one which is still ambiguous as to the precise nature of this relation, comes in Gadamer's survey in Truth and Method of the history of Western thought on language:

> In the midst of the penetration of Christian theology by the Greek idea of logic something new is born: the centre of language, in which the mediating character of the Incarnation event first comes to its full truth. Christology prepares the way for a new anthropology which mediates the finite spirit of man with the divine infinity in a new way. There that which we have called the hermeneutical experience will find its real ground.[11]

Although this seems a clear enough statement that it is the Christian tradition which grounds Gadamer's philosophical project, it is not systematically developed. It is rather in the Platonic experience of Beauty that Gadamer tries to ground his philosophy, a point we will discuss in the next chapter. In fact Gadamer sees an intimate connection

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10 Actually Gadamer can be seen as "out-Hegeling" Hegel when he gives us the conceptual "truth" of Hegel's concept of Spirit which is itself the "truth" of the tradition of Christian spirituality: "This concept of Spirit that transcends the subjectivity of the ego has its true counterpart in the phenomenon of language . . ." (KSI 148; PH 128)

11 WM 405; TM 399. For the history of Western thought on language see Appendix.

between the "other side" of the Platonic doctrine of Beauty and one strand of the Christian tradition, as we can see in the following key passage to which we shall return at several points in Part Two of our study:

> The fact that we have been able to appeal to Plato repeatedly . . . is obviously due to this "other side" of the Platonic doctrine of Beauty which accompanies the history of Aristotelian/scholastic metaphysics like an undercurrent, and emerges from time to time, as in Neo-Platonic and Christian mysticism and in theologies and philosophies of the Spirit. In this tradition of Platonism was formed the conceptual vocabulary needed for thought about the finitude of human existence. Also the affinity which appeared between the Platonic doctrine of Beauty and the idea of a universal hermeneutics testifies to the continuity of this Platonic tradition.[12]

In exactly what way the tradition of Platonism formed the conceptual vocabulary for thinking the finitude of human existence is beyond the scope of this study. What is clear in this passage, however, is that Gadamer sees his own philosophy as somehow rooted in the confluence of the Christian and the Platonic traditions. But what is not clear is precisely how this "other side" of the Platonic understanding of aesthetic experience is related to the religious or mystical experience to which Gadamer refers. The questions of how these are related is the theme of the following chapter.

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[12] WM 461;TM 443

CHAPTER TWO

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Unlike religious experience, aesthetic experience is one of the central themes of Gadamer's writings. Gadamer treats it at length in Part One of Truth and Method, which is entitled "The question of truth as it emerges from the experience of art." And after having extended the question of truth into the human sciences (Part Two) and having attempted to ground the possibility of truth in the universal-ontological function of language (Part Three), he returns in the final chapter of the book to aesthetic experience when he attempts to find the historical roots of his own universal hermeneutics in Plato's doctrine of Beauty.

In fact the expression "aesthetic experience" is perhaps not the most appropriate in this context, because the main thrust of Gadamer's writings on aesthetics is to attempt to overcome the devaluation of "the aesthetic experience" by modern aesthetics; true aesthetic experience is neither "aesthetic" nor an "experience"[1] in the sense given to these terms by modern subjectivistic thinking. Bearing this in mind, we will however, for want of a convenient alternative, continue to use the expression. What Gadamer is most concerned to combat is what he sees as the "subjectivisation" of aesthetics which began with

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[1] "Experience" here translates "Erlebnis", which Gadamer gives a specific meaning quite different from that of "Erfahrung" which is the term we normally render by "experience". "Erlebnis" has more subjective connotations and is used by Gadamer to refer to the sort of experience which the Romantic aesthetic consciousness loves to savour and to "collect". One might see a caricature of this meaning of "aesthetic experience" in the Fin de Siècle decadent "aesthetes". "Erfahrung" on the other hand implies the experience of an encounter with reality which asserts itself, an encounter which changes us. Unless otherwise stated, "experience" in this study always stranslates "Erfahrung".

Kant. In a long section devoted to Kant's Critique of Judgment, Gadamer tries to demonstrate his claim that in Kant the scope of the aesthetic judgment becomes limited from the more general role which it played in the human sciences (including law and morality) in the humanist tradition (WM 1-39; TM 5-39) to a more narrowly "aesthetic" role. Hand in hand with this goes the idea that the aesthetic judgment is not concerned with knowledge and truth (which are only to be found in the conceptual knowledge of the natural sciences). The autonomy of the aesthetic judgment is secured only at the price of subjectivising it, that is, of denying it all access to objective knowledge. According to Gadamer, Kant is at the start of the process of the elevation of the idea of genius and of "aesthetic experience".[2]

This is not the place to attempt a summary of Gadamer's elaborate and subtle examination of this historical development. What it is important for our purposes to note is his intention to overcome the subjectivism of modern aesthetics and to discover the truth of aesthetic experience which this subjectivism has covered over. Gadamer explicitly compares his attempt to "overcome aesthetics" to Heidegger's attempt to "overcome metaphysics"[3] and to allow the truth of Being which it has concealed to shine forth. Indeed the shining forth of Being which was the beginning and end of Heidegger's way of thought is also in a quite literal sense the beginning and end of Gadamer's way of thought in Truth and Method. For the truth of the aesthetic experience which Gadamer says in Part One that he wants

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[2] For a summary of Gadamer's evaluation of Kant's position, see WM 36-39; TM 37-9.

[3] cf. WM 95f; TM 89f.

to uncover emerges at the very end of the book as the experience of the beautiful, of that which is most manifest (to ekphanestaton),[4] of that which has the mode of Being of light. (WM 457; TM 439)

Gadamer wants to take the truth of aesthetic experience, which is the experience of the beautiful, as the key to his universal hermeneutical ontology. That Beauty manifests itself in what is beautiful[5] while at the same time remaining quite distinct from it (Beauty is not a quality of the beautiful object); that Beauty in what is beautiful acts on us, luring us and captivating us, rather than being a subjective idea we impose on what is otherwise a "mere object"; that this happens in history and is not an a-historical or suprahistorical phenomenon (could an Infinite Mind experience beauty in the way we do? cf. WM 461; TM 442); these considerations lead Gadamer to take aesthetic experience as the key to understanding the nature and movement of Being itself. The truth of the aesthetic experience which Gadamer has sought to liberate from the constrictions and distortions of modern aesthetics[6] has turned out to be, according to Gadamer, the most universal and the most profound truth of all.

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4 Phaedrus 250d.

5 Whether person, way of life or science. cf. Symposium 210

6 And also from what Fruchon calls the "ontology of measure", which, in his view, all but covers over the truth of the Platonic doctrine of Beauty. The latter is truly at home with an "ontology of light" (see Fruchon, op.cit., passim). cf. Part One, Chapter 9(c) above, where we questioned whether Platonism can or should be completely "liberated" from its ties with the teleological aspect of Platonism. We also express doubts about "liberating" Christian theology from its teleological "bonds" in Chapter 5(b) below.

But what then is the relation between aesthetic experience and religious experience? We find one clue in the first part of Truth and Method where Gadamer is attempting to overcome the distortions caused by the aesthetic consciousness with its confidence that it can stand over against the work of art and reduce the latter's power to "aesthetic qualities" which are really subjective "experiences", or the connoisseur's own states of consciousness. Here Gadamer invokes the aid of religious experience by describing the "claim" made on the participant in the worship service by the sermon or the celebration of the mass. He writes:

> In this sense comtemporaneity is found especially in the ritual act and in the sermon. The sense of being present is here genuine participation in the event of salvation itself. No one can doubt that the aesthetic differentiation which talks of "beautiful" ceremony or a "good" sermon is out of place in face of the claim made on us. Now I maintain that the same is fundamentally true of experience of art. Here too mediation must be thought of as total. (WM 121; TM 113)

Less explicit than the above is the allusion to religious experience (and this time not only to Western religious experience) which comes at the end of the essay "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics":

> The intimacy with which the work of art touches us is at the same time in an enigmatic way a shattering and an overthrowing of the familiar. It is not only the "This art thou" disclosed in a joyous and frightening shock - it also says to us: "Thou must alter thy life!" (KSII p.8, PH 104)

What we have in both cases is the use of aspects of religious experience in order to highlight, to bring to light, the true nature of aesthetic experience. This is not to say that aesthetic experience is in any sense a species of the genus "religious experience"; it is to say no more than that there is an analogy between religious experience and

aesthetic experience. Indeed Gadamer sometimes seems to move as it were in the opposite direction, when he says that his own description of the experience of the work of art can have consequences for theology.[7] Apparently Gadamer thinks that his description of authentic aesthetic experience can help to overcome the distortions with which theology masks the true nature of religious experience. That there should be such a two-way traffic is by no means a contradiction. That theology and aesthetics should help each other to combat their own tendencies to cover up. to distort, the respective experiences in which each is grounded, might be no bad thing.[8]

However our concern here is not so much with the relation between aesthetics and theology, as with that between aesthetic experience and religious experience. We are not so much interested at this point in interdisciplinary dialogue as in the relation of aesthetic and religious experience with regard to the ultimate grounding of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. We have described above how the truth of the aesthetic

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[7] See KSI 91f; PH 209ff; cf. Chapter 3(b) below.

[8] That theology should by implication be portrayed as the attempt to articulate religious experience by no means places us in the camp of Schleiermacher. While acknowledging that Schleiermacher may have something important and true to say, an emphasis on religious experience no more ties us to Romantic theology than Gadamer's emphasis on the hermeneutical experience ties him to Romantic hermeneutics. Karl Barth's chapter on "The Word of God and Experience" (Church Dogmatics 1/1) with its opposition to "Christian Cartesianism" in some ways parallels Gadamer's stress on "Erfahrung" as opposed to Romantic, subjectivised "Erlebnisse" and states-of-consciousness. But the "otherness" of Barth's "Other," i.e. the Word, is meant in an exclusive sense quite different from Gadamer's understanding of the "otherness" we encounter in experience, cf. Chapter 3(c) below. How precisely theology, philosophy and religious experience relate to each other is far from self-evident. In pursuing this question we might do worse than to take Hegel as "partner in dialogue", as Gadamer does when working out his concept of experience (see Part One, Chapter 3 above). For more on this topic see Chapter 6 below.

experience which Gadamer attempted to uncover in the first part of Truth and Method returns in the final chapter as the doctrine of Beauty which Gadamer "retrieves" from Plato. As we have seen, this doctrine of Beauty provides for Gadamer the key to understanding Being as such - Being which as language with its "speculative" structure draws us into its historical play which is tradition. We must not underestimate the fact that after 450 dense and meticulously documented pages Gadamer choses to rest his case with this doctrine of Beauty which he has wrested from Plato. The experience of Beauty is for him the experience in which we learn what reality is like. Our experience of Beauty is that which must determine our basic relation to the world and to ourselves.[9]

The question which we must ask however is: what has happended to religious experience in all this? What is striking (at least to the student of theology) in this last chapter of Truth and Method is the almost complete absence of any significant reference to religious experience in general and to Christian experience in particular. This absence is striking because the "speculative" structure of Being which Gadamer finds in the experience of Beauty is so much more clearly manifested in the Christian tradition. Gadamer himself has, as we have seen, noted the importance of Christological thought in grounding the hermeneutical experience (WM 405; TM 388, quoted in previous chapter), though he fails to develop the point. Fruchon, however, makes this point strongly:

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[9] In the sense that this experience determines how we should understand Understanding in its all-embracing sense i.e. as an "existential".

> The ontology wrested from Platonism does justice to the central teaching of the Christian tradition, notably to the affirmation that the manifestation of Being is inseparable from the "kenosis" in which it puts itself inside a finite form which it leads back to itself. Here we recognize, and let it not be forgotten, under the influence of Platonism, not only the essence of John's Gospel but the characteristic rhythm of the hymn which Paul used in the letter to the Philippians (2:6-11), and on which Hegel gave an admirable commentary in the study of "Manifest Religion" in the Phenomenology of Spirit.[10]

Of course Gadamer has devoted a section of Truth and Method to the study of the role which Christian speculation on the Word plays in the development of the concept of language.[11] But to limit the role of the Christian tradition to its contribution to the history of the concept of language is so to restrict the role that it is allowed to play that Gadamer could almost be accused of going against his own phenomenological principles of letting what is there show itself. It must also be acknowledged that Gadamer makes many references throughout his writings to all periods of Christian thought. What arouses comment, however, is the lack of references in this critical final chapter of Truth and Method. For it would seem easier to "retrieve" the notion of Being as "speculative", the conviction that reality is self-giving and at the same time demanding of unreserved commitment, from Christian tradition than from Plato's doctrine of Beauty. Gadamer's reading of Plato may not quite be strained, but it is at the least highly ingenious and subtle. This is not to say that what Gadamer derives from Plato is not important and true. Only how much more obviously important and true would have been similar results derived from a reading of the Christian tradition rather than the Platonic.

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[10] Fruchon, op.cit., p.558

[11] See Appendix

Of course one does not want to set the Christian and the Platonic traditions against each other; it is not a case of "either-or". We have already quoted at the end of our previous chapter the one important reference to the role of Christianity which Gadamer makes in the final chapter of Truth and Method, and we have seen how this reference comes in the context of Gadamer's stress on the importance of the Platonic tradition. This would seem to imply that for Gadamer the Christian tradition plays its part in grounding his philosophical hermeneutics to the extent that it is a part of the Platonic tradition that Gadamer sees as so important. Christianity, it appears, is important insofar as it is the subordinate member of the Christian-Platonic tradition.

At this point one can only ask whether Gadamer is not perhaps putting the cart before the horse. One can agree with Gadamer that there is a blend of Platonism and Christianity which is like an undercurrent accompanying the tradition of "official" Christianity and scholastic metaphysics.[12] After Nietzche and Heidegger it is the apparent openness of Gadamer to the truth of Christian faith and the "other side" of Platonism which is so appealing to Christian thought.[13] But we must nevertheless ask where in this Christian-Platonic tradition the ultimate priority lies. In this tradition in which Christian and Platonic themes are interwoven and even fused together, where do the real impetus and the real power lie? What Gadamer wants to say about Being seems to derive from the Christian themes of Incarnation, Kenosis and Grace; and while similar themes may no doubt be read out of Plato's

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[12] This latter partnership might well be identified with what Heidegger called "onto-theo-logy".

[13] Though, as we have suggested above in Part One, Chapter 9(c), the teleological side of Platonism (and Christianity) may also have their own truth, despite Gadamer's unwillingness to recognize this.

doctrine of Beauty, one wonders how historically effective (to use Gadamer's own terminology) these have been apart from the tradition in which we find them interwoven with the Christian themes. Does the experience to which the Platonic doctrine of Beauty points have the power on its own to inspire a tough and an honest faith that this is how reality is, that reality is gracious, the manifestation of the Good? Is the self-forgetfulness of the experience of the beautiful as radical as the dying and rising with the crucified and risen Christ?[14] It is of course artificial to set Christianity and Platonism against each other in this way. As Nietzsche recognized, in a certain sense they stand or fall together; such attempts as there have been to affect a divorce have usually come from the "Biblical" wing of the Christian tradition.[15] What we are questioning here is merely whether the doctrine of Beauty which Gadamer derives from Plato can alone bear the entire weight of his philosophical hermeneutics and whether it should not rather be placed back in the bonds of its historical marriage with the Christian tradition? Is it with Plato that the last word should lie?

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[14] This is not to deny that there have in fact been Platonists, e.g. Plotinus, whose experience of the "truth of Being" had unquestionably been profound and authentic, and yet who have rejected Christianity. It is merely to suggest that in the tradition it is the Christian themes which have been powerful, have been in Gadamer's own terms "at work" (cf. "die Wirkungsgeschichte"). The texts from which Gadamer derives his doctrine of Beauty were after all largely unknown for much of the Middle Ages (only the Timaeus was well-known, according to A.E. Taylor in Plato: the Man and his Work (3rd ed.; London: Methuen, 1929), p.436). The influence of Plato's doctrine of Beauty was no doubt there, but mediated by Christian sources, e.g. Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius, cf. Putnam, op. cit.

[15] The problem with trying to maintain a purely "Biblical" theology is, however, that almost from the beginning Christian faith has tried to express itself in "non-Biblical" thought-forms. It is arguably as schizophrenic for a first century Greek to try to think purely in "Biblical" (or "Hebraic") terms as it is for a twentieth century Scot. It is to be hoped that the spectre of a purely "Biblical" theology has finally been laid. However it must be admitted that it is quite a way from such a pious hope to a fully fledged Christian Platonism.

CHAPTER THREE

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY (GADAMER AND BULTMANN)

Perhaps the best way of leading into our discussion in the remaining chapters of the relation between Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and the Christian tradition is to give an account of Gadamer's relation to the theology of Bultmann. Gadamer was a student and a friend of Bultmann in Marburg in the 1920's and it was in this context that he first worked out his relation as a philosopher to Christian theology. The most important material on Bultmann is concentrated in three essays and we shall deal with these in chronological order.

(a) The first text which is important for our understanding of Gadamer's relation to Bultmann is "On the Problem of Self-Understanding" /Zur Problematik des Selbstverstandnisses/ (1962). (KSI 170-81; PH 44-58) In this essay Gadamer explicitly says that he hopes his philosophical reflections may be able to contribute something to the theological debate which was provoked by Bultmann's controversial essay "New Testament and Mythology" (1941).[1] Gadamer's intention is to call in question the notion of self-understanding as this is used in Bultmannian theology, and to suggest its replacement by a notion of Understanding conceived in terms of "play" or "the game". (KSI 70; PH 65) Gadamer is concerned to stress the development in Heidegger's writings from "the transcendental

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[1] See Hans-Werner Bartsch (ed.), Kerygma and Myth I, trans. by R.H. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1972), 1-44. Gadamer's essay has the subtitle (ommitted in English trans.) "A hermeneutical contribution to the question of 'demythologizing'" and appeared under the title "Understanding and Playing" in the volumes devoted to the problems raised by Bultmann's seminal essay, see Kerygma und Mythos, vol. 6,1.

schema which still determined the concept of self-understanding in Being and Time" (KSI 74; PH 49) to the priority of language over the "self" in the Understanding process.[2] (KSI 74; PH 50) What Gadamer does not say explicitly here (as he comes much nearer to doing in the next essay we will deal with) is that he believes that this move on Heidegger's part[3] undermines Bultmann's theological position since the latter is at one with (if not dependent on) the transcendental concept of self-understanding which Heidegger has moved beyond. Here Gadamer omits this explicitly negative conclusion and contents himself with the positive suggestion that the concept of Understanding which emerges for him from the writings of the later Heidegger is just as appropriate for theology as it is for other hermeneutical disciplines. He writes:

> . . . in Understanding there is a moment of selflessness which is also relevant to theological hermeneutics and which is to be investigated in terms of the structure of play or the game. (KSI 75; PH 51)

Gadamer begins to spell out the relevance for theology of his concept of Understanding as play by comparing the relation between mythos and logos in ancient Greece with the relation between the Biblical tradition and the work of the Christian theologian. (KSI 75ff; PH 51ff) The Enlightenment programme of the systematic "de-magification" of the world, and hence of a movement away from mythos to logos, is a prejudice which is incapable of understanding the real relation of the Greek to his myths.[4] The Greek does not stand over against his myths in such a way that he can extract whatever is "true" in them ("true", that is, in terms of his own "logical" criteria) and reject all the rest as "mere

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[2] On this see Part One, Chapter 1 and passim.

[3] A move which in his view is at most a change in emphasis rather than any about-face. See Part One, Chapter 1(a) above.

[4] For the Enlightenment and prejudice, see Part One, Chapter 1(b) above.

myth". It is not a case of his deciding just how much he is prepared to believe and rejecting the rest. According to Gadamer the Greek stands in a relation which is best understood as a game in which the myth is so much part of who he is, so determines his consciousness, that he cannot reduce it to a mere "object" to accept or reject. But at the same time he enjoys a freedom to interpret the myth in his own way. The question whether or not he "believes" in the myth is not one which it is appropriate to ask, according to Gadamer. The concept of the game does not allow this distinction, for while it has its own kind of seriousness and its own kind of freedom, it does not permit the "player" so to abstract himself from the play situation that he or she can stand apart as an isolated self-sufficient judging subject. To abstract oneself from the game is to disrupt the game, to be a "spoil-sport". The distance between subject and object, interpreter and myth, the freedom of the former with regard to the latter, is not the distance and freedom of an autonomous judging subject over against a mere object; it is a distance and freedom which is not at the disposal of the subject or interpreter, but comes to him or her as a gift of the game itself which embraces both participants in its movement to and fro.[5]

What is important for Christian theology according to Gadamer, is that the "play structure" which holds between the Greek and his myths

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[5] The above paragraph represents an attempt to interpret, to put into the present writer's own (no doubt very Gadamerian!) words, this passage on the relation of mythos and logos in ancient Greece. The present writer is not at all confident that he has got to the bottom of what Gadamer is saying here. He has interpreted the relation of interpreter and myth in terms of what Gadamer says elsewhere about the relation of interpreter and tradition (and as far as it goes this seems to make sense of the passage). But specifically concerning belief in myths the present writer is not clear what exactly Gadamer is saying here. This is at least partly due to the rather cryptic nature of Gadamer's references.

also holds between the Christian theologian and Scripture. The problem of the presence of myth in Scripture is no more to be approached from the standpoint of the Enlightenment prejudice against "mere myth" than is the relation of the Greek to his myths. And contrary to what some people like to believe, Bultmann is very far from succumbing to this Enlightenment prejudice; he wants rather to make sure that the truth of myth makes its claim on us.

Beyond making this important but by no means original point concerning Bultmann's attitude to myth, Gadamer makes no more specific contribution to the theological debate. And this is understandable to the extent that, according to Gadamer, the debate tends to be concerned with dogmatic problems of demarcation rather than with general hermeneutical principles (though, one might add, the former are no doubt inextricably involved with the latter):

> The theological problems have to do not with the hermeneutical phenomenon of demythologizing as such, but with its dogmatic implications; with whether or not, from the dogmatic standpoint of Protestant theology, Bultmann correctly draws the boundaries within which demythologizing is to be applied.[6]

Gadamer's contribution is thus limited to the proposal of a general hermeneutical principle - that of understanding the relation of scripture and interpreter not so much in terms of the interpreter's self-understanding (as in Bultmann) as in terms of the game. The game also provides the best way of presenting the relation of faith and understanding (KSI 76; PH 53). It is worth quoting in extenso the passage where Gadamer explains why he believes this to be so:

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6 KSI 70; PH 44. cf. WM 492; TM 473.

> The self-understanding of faith is determined precisely by the fact that from a theological perspective faith is not a human possibility but is God's act of grace which happens to the believer. But it is difficult to hold fast to this theological insight and religious experience to the extent that human self-understanding is dominated by modern science and its methodology. The concept of knowledge based on the latter can tolerate no restriction of its claim to universality. Because of this claim all self-understanding appears as a sort of self-possession, which excludes nothing so much as the idea that something can happen to it which separates it from itself. Here the concept of play can be important. For absorption into the game, this ecstatic loss of self, is not so much experienced as a loss of self-possession but rather positively as the free buoyancy of an elevation above oneself.[7]

What is not entirely clear in this essay is exactly how Gadamer thinks this contribution of his relates to Bultmann. The implication is that Bultmann's concept of self-understanding is derived from an understanding of Being and Time which stresses the role of the self too much to do justice to the experience of faith. That Bultmann's approach is to this extent inadequate Gadamer does not explicitly say here (though he comes nearer to doing so in a later essay, as we shall see). But the implication is that Bultmann's conceptual apparatus is not such as to allow an adequate theological presentation of the Christian experience of faith. Whether beyond this Gadamer thinks that this inadequate conceptual apparatus can have a distorting effect on the experience of faith itself is not indicated. The relation between theology and faith is no less ambiguous than the relation between hermeneutics and the hermeneutical experience in Gadamer. Gadamer often gives the impression that the hermeneutical experience (and presumably the experience of Christian faith) are relatively independent of the conceptual apparatus that tries to give a theoretical account of them. He seems to appeal to that which always happens anyway which we could see clearly if only we didn't keep getting ourselves and our methods in the

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[7] KSI 77f; PH 54f

way. But as we have suggested elsewhere, the relation between theory and experience[8] is more complicated than this. Theory only grows out of hermeneutical experience and in turn affects hermeneutical experience. Theology, presumably, only grows out of religious experience and in turn affects (and perhaps also effects) religious experience.[9]

We are, however, already straying into an area which we shall return to in our final chapter. For the moment let us note that Gadamer's attitude in this essay seems to be that philosophical hermeneutics, as a discipline external to andindependent of Christian theology, can offer help to theology which is the theory of the understanding of the subject-matter of the Bible, an understanding which is appropriately described as faith.[10] Philosophical hermeneutics can help theology by offering it the model of play for understanding Understanding, a model which is, in Gadamer's view, more appropriate to theology's task than the outmoded and inadequate concept of Understanding with which the latter has been encumbered hitherto. However there seems to be a danger here (from a

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8 "Experience" here is broad enough to include "praxis", for "experience" is the experience made by the Understanding which (following Heidegger) is a fundamental mode of Being of ~~Dasein~~ there-being and which is prior to the opposition of theory and praxis. cf. WM 245; TM 230.

9 That theology should be seen as the theory of religious experience (including praxis) and Christian theology as the theory of Christian experience and praxis seems to the present writer to be no more than is said in the phrase "fides quaerens intellectum." Though that this phrase is open to more than one interpretation nothing shows better than Karl Barth's book of that title!

10 Whether "unfaith" can be described as a genuine understanding of the content of the Bible remains an open question. But to fail to see the need to choose between faith and unfaith is arguably to fail to understand that content. In this we are repeating the point made so forcefully by Karl Barth that whatever else Biblical criticism may be, it is no substitute for a real understanding of the subject-matter of the Bible. See especially the Preface to the Second Edition of Barth's The Epistle to the Romans, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: OUP, 1968), pp.6ff.

theological point of view) of reducing theological hermeneutics to a department within the broader context of a universal philosophical hermeneutics. Theology on this view seems little more than what we might call a "regional hermeneutics". The student of theology may well wonder whether the relation of philosophical hermeneutics to theology can be such a merely external one, and whether Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics itself might not have a more intimate connection with the religious experience of faith than this essay would lead one to believe. It is in the context of our discussion of the next essay that we may best pursue these questions.

(b) The second text which informs us about Gadamer's relation to Bultmann is the essay "Martin Heidegger and Marburg Theology" (1964). (KSI 82-92; PH 198-212) The essay is important not only as a presentation of Gadamer's understanding of Heidegger and of Bultmann, that is, as philosophical and theological document; it is important also as an historical document in that it gives a first-hand account of the turbulent philosophical and theological scene in Marburg in the 1920's.[1] For example, Gadamer begins the essay by giving a sketch of the meeting of the theological community at which the speaker was Edward Thurneysen, "a first herald of dialectical theology in Marburg" for the younger members of the audience (including Gadamer). He also records Heidegger's contribution to that meeting, although this contribution has for Gadamer, as we shall see, a much more than "merely historical" interest (it is rather of "effective-historical" significance).

The centre of the essay is Gadamer's assessment of the consequences of Heidegger's "turn" for Bultmann's theological programme. Here is made explicit what was implied in the earlier essay on Bultmann. First of all Gadamer claims that Bultmann's theological position is based on a particular interpretation of Being and Time:[2]

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[1] For an evocation of this period (and in particular of Bultmann's weekly "at homes" where the Greek classics were read, wine imbibed and jokes recounted) see Gadamer's Philosophische Lehrjahre, pp.14-59.

[2] That the early Heidegger himself almost invited such an interpretation Gadamer admits elsewhere, see KS III 158f; PH 141.

> . . . under the influence of Heidegger's thought Bultmann explicated his position by means of the concepts of inauthenticity and authenticity. There-being which has fallen into the world and which understands itself in terms of what is at its disposal is called to conversion, and in the collapse /Scheitern/ of its self-sufficiency experiences the turn to authenticity. To Bultmann the transcendental analytic of There-being seemed to describe a neutral anthropological basic constitution /Grundverfassung/ in terms of which the call to faith could be interpreted "existentially" independently of its contents . . . . It was therefore precisely the transcendental-philosophical conception of Being and Time that fitted in with his theological thinking.[3]

But this interpretation of Being and Time is one which Heidegger increasingly chose to reject:

> Meanwhile Heidegger's way of thought went in the opposite direction. This transcendental-philosophical self-conception proved to be less and less suited to the inmost concern of Heidegger's thought - the concern which had moved him from the beginning. And the later talk of the "turn" which eliminated every existentiell sense from talk of There-being's authenticity, and hence from the concept of authenticity itself, could no longer, in my opinion, be combined with the basic theological concern of Rudolf Bultmann.[4]

Of course Gadamer does not actually say that Bultmann's theological approach is inadequate. While claiming that it is beyond his competence to judge the exegetical fruitfulness of Bultmann's approach, he admits that the existentialist interpretation of Paul and John brought the kerygmatic meaning of the New Testament proclamation to its highest fulfilment. (ibid.) But his own conviction that the only way to interpret Being and Time is in terms of the later Heidegger means that he is bound to see Bultmann's theological approach as at least one-sided.

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[3] KSI 89; PH 206f

[4] KSI 89; PH 207

To understand in what sense Bultmann is "one-sided" we must go back to that meeting in Marburg where Thurneysen spoke as "the herald of dialectical theology". Gadamer records Heidegger's contribution to the discussion:

> After invoking the Christian scepticism of Franz Overbeck, he said that it is the true task of theology, which must be rediscovered, to see the word which is capable of calling to faith and of preserving in faith. A genuine Heidegger-sentence, full of ambiguity. These words of Heidegger seemed to set theology a task, and yet they went beyond that attack on the theology of his time by Franz Overbeck which Heidegger had cited, for they suggested despair about the possibility of theology itself. [5]

It appears that Heidegger is here expressing doubts about the ability of dialectical theology to perform the task of theology. The call to faith is one thing, and no doubt dialectical theology with its Dada-istic zeal (if one may so put it) was rather good at shattering complacency and opening men and women to the claim of the gospel. But was it really theology?[6] The preservation in faith, the continuity and the expression of faith in word and deed were quite another matter. It was all very well to insist on the immediacy of the encounter between, on the one hand, the kerygma with its Absolute Paradox, and, on the other, men and women with their continually foundering attempts at self-justification, as dialectical theology did, following in the long-forgotten footsteps of Kierkegaard. But this immediacy of the encounter with the claim of the kerygma somehow had to be mediated, i.e. preserved, spoken about ("brought to language"), handed on, translated into "ethics" and so on; and this could not be achieved merely by the perpetual "repetition" of the moment of immediacy when the claim of the kerygma encountered foundering human pride.

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[5] KSI 82; PH 198

[6] The development of Karl Barth testifies to an awareness of precisely this question. The appropriateness of his answer is another matter.

Whether some such thoughts were in the head of Heidegger when he made the remark recorded here it is no doubt rash to speculate. But certainly some such thoughts are in the head of Gadamer as he recalls the remark.[7] For Bultmann always remained faithful to his roots in dialectical theology and the one-sidedness which Gadamer by implication finds in Bultmann is precisely the one-sidedness of dialectical theology. This emerges when, immediately following the passage quoted above in which the incompatability of the concerns of Bultmann and Heidegger are stressed, Gadamer writes:

> Thus Heidegger was now really approaching for the first time the dimension in which could be fulfilled his early demand that theology should find the word not only to call to faith, but also to preserve in faith. If the call to faith, the claim which challenges the self-sufficiency of the ego and compels it to self-surrender in faith, can be interpreted in terms of self-understanding, then perhaps a language of faith which could preserve in faith was something else. And it was precisely this language for which Heidegger's thought sketched out a new basis ever more clearly: truth as an event that contains its own error; unconcealment /Entbergung/ that is concealment /Verbergung/ and also a sheltering /Bergung/; and also the famous phrase from the Letter on Humanism, according to which language is the "house of Being"; all this points beyond the horizon of any self-understanding, no matter how "foundering" and historical.[8]

However accurate this interpretation of the development of Heidegger may be, what it is important for our purposes to note is that Gadamer points his own philosophical endeavours in the direction that he understands Heidegger to have taken. He writes:

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[7] Gadamer's Hegelian leanings place a much greater distance between himself and Kierkegaard than would seem to have been the case with Heidegger in the early 1920's.

[8] KSI 90; PH 208

> However one can also advance from the experience of Understanding and the historicality of self-understanding in the same direction, and this is the starting point of my own attempts at a philosophical hermeneutic.[9]

The implication of this is that Gadamer too is engaged in finding a language in which one could be "preserved in faith". We may leave aside the question as to what extent Heidegger's work was implicitly theological; what is clear enough is that Gadamer's work in some sense is. But in precisely what sense Gadamer's work impinges on theology is far from clear.

From one point of view it looks as if the relation of Gadamer to theology is merely external. Gadamer's exploration of the experience of art leads him to a concept of Understanding which can help theology by providing it with an appropriate way of understanding its own relation to the Bible. (KSI 90f; PH 208f) The difficulty with this (from the theological point of view) is that theology then becomes what we have called a "regional hermeneutics" within an all-embracing universal philosophical hermeneutics. But this runs directly counter to theology's own claim to universality. A theology which is reduced to a department of a universal hermeneutics, to being a discipline which studies religious texts as opposed to legal, historical or any other sort of text, may call itself Biblical Studies, but it is arguably no longer theology.

Of course Gadamer wants to model his universal hermeneutics on the dogmatic approaches of theological and legal hermeneutics (WM 294; TM 277), so there would be no grave danger of theological hermeneutics being reduced to Biblical criticism, the danger to which Liberal theology is commonly supposed to have succumbed. Gadamer insists that all hermeneutics has to do with the content of the text it is engaged

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[9] KSI 90; PH 208

with. The trouble with the content of the particular text (or texts) with which Christian theology has to do (i.e. the Bible) is that it claims to have the first and last word about not only the claim that it makes (i.e. the kerygma) but also the appropriate response to that claim (i.e. faith). In other words, the Bible tells us about the appropriate way in which to understand itself; it already contains the hermeneutical principles in terms of which alone it demands to be understood. Indeed one might even say that its specific content is this hermeneutical principle, since (at least in the Protestant tradition) the central content of the New Testament proclamation is that faith (which is the appropriate way to understand that content) is the gracious gift of God. The message does not also or incidentally tell us how it is to be appropriated; the message is the gift of that appropriation (i.e. grace-faith). The Christian experience then has its own sort of "reflexivity" in which form and content, the "that" and the "what" (the "what" of the message and the "that" of its appropriation) interpenetrate one another. This mysterious "reflexivity" is usually ascribed to the workings of the Holy Spirit.[10]

It follows from the above that theology so understood will not submit to any hermeneutical principle imposed on it from without. It will always see such imposition as "Babylonian captivity". For this reason Christian theology would do well to be suspicious when Gadamer offers to help it out with a universal philosophical hermeneutics which he has developed from his study of aesthetic experience, of legal hermeneutics and, last and apparently least, pre-Schleiermacher dogmatically grounded theological hermeneutics.

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[10] e.g. 1 Corinthians 2:9-12.
It is doubtless no accident that the reflexive philosopher par excellence, Hegel, should have called his philosophy a philosophy of Spirit.

However, while for most of the time in these essays Gadamer seems to envisage the relation of philosophical hermeneutics and theology as external in the sense sketched out above, at other times he gives the impression that his philosophical hermeneutics is not so much an external aid with which the theologian may better pursue his own separate task as it is the very truth which the theologian is groping after. Gadamer writes in the previous essay "On the Problem of Self-understanding":

> The self that we are does not possess itself. We could rather say that it "happens". And this is what the theologian is really saying when he says that faith is an even in which a new human being is established. He also says that it is the Word /Gadamer is here playing on the ambiguity of "Wort" which can mean either "God's Word" or "the word" i.e. language/ that is believed and understood and through which we overcome the abysmal ignorance about ourselves in which we live.[11]

We might well ask what Gadamer means when he says that what he says is what the theologian "really" means. There is a suspicion that in some sort of Hegelian fashion Gadamer thinks he is giving adequate philosophical expression to the truth that the theologian in his own way and in his own rather picturesque images is groping after. This suspicion is increased when we read in another essay "The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century":

> This concept of Spirit that transcends the subjectivity of the ego has its true counterpart in the phenomenon of language, which has increasingly become the focal point of contemporary philosophy. The phenomenon of language possesses an advantage which is appropriate to our finitude, and which distinguishes it from that concept of Spirit which Hegel drew from the Christian tradition: it is infinite like Spirit and yet finite like every event.[12]

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[11] KSI 78; PH 55

[12] KSI 148; PH 128

When we return to the essay under consideration in this section it is perhaps with less confidence (at least from a theological standpoint) in the reassuring tone of voice with which Gadamer tells us of Heidegger's and his own intentions of sketching out a new foundation for the language of faith, for the language that would preserve one in faith. For it is not clear whether Gadamer's (and Heidegger's) work is to be seen as an external aid to theology, or is in some sense itself performing the task of theology. Is the language that preserves in faith a language which has still to be worked out by theology with the help of Gadamer (and Heidegger); or is "the phenomenon of language" which Gadamer (and Heidegger) is so anxious to place at the centre of philosophy itself the language that preserves in faith? Is it the specific language of the Christian tradition,[13] properly appropriated with the aid of Gadamer's universal philosophical hermeneutics, which preserves in faith; or is it tradition as such, grounded in the gracious play of "language itself", that supports, that is "saving"? That the second member of each of these alternatives is the case is suggested by the concluding sentence of the essay, a sentence which consciously echoes the "Heidegger-sentence" quoted at the beginning:

> Every answer to the claim of tradition and not only the word which theology has to seek, is a word which preserves.[14]

Evidently not only "Heidegger-sentences" are full of ambiguity!

That it is obviously an error (from the standpoint of Christian faith) to attempt to express that faith in conceptual terms and so to take Christian faith as the key to understanding all reality (i.e. to make Christian faith the basis of a Christian philosophy) is by no means self-evident. The intentions of Hegel, for example, should not

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[13] Fuchs would say: the language of Jesus.

[14] KSI 92; PH 211

in the present writer's view be dismissed as abruptly as they often are by Christian theologians. That Gadamer may be doing something similar is a possibility which we have already envisaged and will discuss later.[15] What emerges from these essays is that if he is doing so, he is certainly not doing so explicitly. And the danger of this lack of explicitness is that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics (if it is not seen as an external aid to theology - a position which, as we have seen, has its problems) may be seen merely as the replacement of theology.[16]

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[15] See Chapter 6 below.

[16] If Hegel is accused of such a replacement of theology when he made his indebtedness to the Christian religion abundantly clear, how much more can this accusation be made when the indebtedness is not made explicit!

(c) Gadamer's attitude to the theology of Bultmann can be seen in a rather different light in the section of his essay "Hermeneutics and Historicism"[1] which he devotes to the discussion of the hermeneutical problem in modern Protestant theology. It is interesting to note there an indication that, while he may regard Bultmann's theological programme as in need of supplementation, he nevertheless has a deep respect for Bultmann and thinks that it is easier to see the limitations of the latter's work than creatively to overcome them (as more than one theologian has discovered, one might add):

> Perhaps, indeed certainly, it is possible to understand "more" in the New Testament than Bultmann has understood. But this can only come about when one understands this "more" just as well, that is, one really understands it.[2]

These sentences are helpful in that they keep Gadamer's criticisms of Bultmann in their proper perspective.

However the passage that is really important for our present purposes is the one where Gadamer brings out the incompatibility between what is by implication his own general philosophical hermeneutics and Christian theology seen in Bultmann's terms. In this passage Gadamer is attempting to show how the idea of self-understanding in Bultmann is quite different from self-knowledge not only in any psychologistic sense, but also in the "deeper, more speculative sense which determines the concept of Spirit in German idealism, according to which completed self-consciousness recognizes itself in the Other". (SM 496; TM 476) In Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit consciousness only attains to self-consciousness through recognition of the Other. (ibid.) Self-understanding in Bultmann's sense is also dependent on the recognition of

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[1] Appended to the 2nd edition of Wahrheit und Methode (WM 477-512; TM 460-491); for the section on hermeneutics and modern Protestant theology see WM 492-499; TM 473-478.

[2] WM 493; TM 473

the Other; but this Other is different from Hegel's Other. It is the "Wholly Other"[3], the "extra nos" of dialectical theology, and unlike Hegel's Other it cannot be mediated, "aufgehoben", into the developing totality; it is "unaufhebbar".

Thus Gadamer sharply contrasts the uniqueness of the Christian self-understanding which comes in the encounter with the "Wholly Other" with the self-knowledge which comes as the result of the experience of the encounter with the Other, as this is described, for example, in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. Gadamer asserts the uniqueness and the absolute nature of the Christian claim in the strongest possible terms:

> That self-understanding which we achieve in ever new experiences with what is other and with other people remains from the Christian point of view in an essential sense non-understanding.[4] (ibid)

The experience of coming-to-grief or "foundering" /Scheitern/ is not confined to Christian experience; indeed it is this experience of coming into violent collision with the Other which allows a new and deepened human self-understanding to emerge. (ibid.) But from the Christian perspective, according to Gadamer, all such deepening of self-understanding through what we might call "penultimate" coming-to-grief is obliterated, annihilated, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The salvation event is, from this particular theological stance, the absolute end of "the old man", be he ever so learned in the hard school of experience. This is the theological position which Gadamer ascribes to Bultmann and his "eschatological event of faith"

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3 Gadamer does not actually use the term "Wholly Other"; the closest he comes is "the Other which is not at our disposal" /das unverfugbar Andere/. But given the connection of Bultmann with dialectical theology, it seems legitimate to use the phrase "Wholly Other" for the sake of clarity of exposition.

4 ibid.

(correctly, in the present writer's view), and which in this passage he assumes to be the Christian position pure and simple (which the present writer would dispute).

At any rate, as will by now be apparent, the position which Gadamer opposes to the exclusiveness of the Christian claim is not only that of Hegel and German Idealism, but also his own. Admittedly Gadamer does not say this explicitly; but there can be little doubt that the phrases Gadamer uses to describe the deepening of self-understanding through the experience of the Other, and the experience of "coming-to-grief", could apply (and are intended to apply) to his own "hermeneutical theory of experience" with its central theme of "pathei mathos", of learning through suffering, just as well as they apply to Hegel's "Science of the experience of consciousness". Not, of course, that Gadamer is saying the same as Hegel; as we have seen he endeavours to differentiate his own position from that of Hegel. But insofar as Hegel has a radically different view of the relation between experience and self-understanding from that of Bultmann, Gadamer implicitly sides with Hegel.

What is remarkable, however, is that Gadamer seems to see Bultmann's theological position as the only possible Christian position, and in doing so by implication places his own philosophical position in opposition to "the Christian position". Bultmann's "eschatological event" would mean the end too of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. If Bultmann's theological position were "the Christian position" then clearly Gadamer is quite right thus to distance himself from Christian faith and experience. However Gadamer neglects to say that Hegel not only differs radically

from Bultmann in his presentation of the relation between self-understanding and experience; he differs just as radically in his presentation of the relation between self-understanding and Christian experience. For Hegel Christian faith and experience are not simply the end, the obliteration, of all previous experience; they are rather the fulfilment of all previous experience. For Hegel Christian faith and experience do not mean the devaluation of all other experience; they are rather the key which allows us to make sense of all other experience. For Hegel Christian self-understanding does not reject all other self-understanding as "essentially non-understanding"; it sees it rather as the preparation, the embryo, the analogy, of itself. For Hegel the world and history are not related to the Christian only paradoxically, only "eschatologically"; they are "the laboratories of the Spirit".

Hegel, of course, has his own perculiar form of "eschatology". And Gadamer is quite right to suggest that the eschatological aspect of the Christian tradition raises questions for a philosophy like his own.[5] But that this eschatological aspect should be identified with Bultmann's interpretation of it is by no means self-evident. This premature identification is a disturbing truncation of a subject, and a tradition, which are worthy of a more patient and a more careful exploration. Moreover such an attitude on Gadamer's part seems to contradict his attitude elsewhere. Here he seems ready (for whatever reasons) to identify Christian theology with the rather narrow and exclusivistic concerns of dialectical theology which he rightly sees informing Bultmann's concept of "faith as eschatological event"; and

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[5] See next chapter.

in doing so he distances his own philosophical endeavours from "theology". Elsewhere (as we have seen) his concern seems to be to help Bultmann's theology to escape from the narrow confines of dialectical theology, and (in the company of Heidegger, we are told) to use his own philosophical endeavours to help that theology to perform its true task, that is, to find the word that preserves in faith. Other scattered references to all stages of the Christian tradition suggest that this latter concern is Gadamer's real concern, and that in the passage we have examined here he has allowed himself to be provoked by the polemical edge of dialectical theology.[6] But this latter concern is, as we have seen, rather ambiguous. This ambiguity is characteristic of the relationship between Christian faith and speculative philosophy, a relationship to which we will return in our final chapter.

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[6] The appropriate (and no doubt in its own way provocative) reply of a descendent of Hegel to the sometimes shrill invective of the descendents of Kierkegaard is not "You are wrong" but "Of course you are <u>partly</u> right".

C H A P T E R F O U R

DEATH AND DIALECTIC (GADAMER AND THE PROBLEM OF ESCHATOLOGY)

We have already noted Gadamer's implicit distancing of himself from Bultmann's theological concept of "faith as eschatological event". Now we must examine in a little more detail how Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics stands in relation to the question of eschatology. This will involve a further look at the eschatology developed by Bultmann as well as at its philosophical counterpart in the earlier writings of Heidegger, and also a look at the eschatology of Hegel, the other modern philosopher whose thought exerts a powerful influence on Gadamer (section a). Then, after a brief discussion of whether we may legitimately talk of theodicy in connection with Gadamer (section b), the chapter will close with a discussion of the two main types of eschatology to be found in the Christian tradition, and of how these relate to Gadamer's undertaking (section c).

(a) Gadamer and the eschatologies of Heidegger and Hegel

The end of history as this is envisaged in Bultmann's "eschatological event of faith" means, as a glance at his Gifford Lectures will show, not the consummation and fulfilment of world history, nor even the consummation and fulfilment of an individual's history. It means rather the sheer transcendence of history by the individual as he or she encounters the Eternal in the kerygma of the crucified and risen Christ. Universal history and personal history come to an end in the death of Christ and his resurrection into the kerygma of the eschatological community whose existence is at once and paradoxically beyond and within history. As Bultmann puts it in a famous sentence from

his Gifford Lectures, a sentence which, with its linking of history with sin, has peculiar Platonic overtones:

> The paradox that Christian existence is at the same time an eschatological unwordly being and a historical being is analogous with the Lutheran statement: simul justus, simul peccator.[1]

Such a paradoxical connection of history and transcendence seems to be present also in the work of Heidegger, with his notion of "finite transcendence" (to borrow W.J. Richardson's phrase). Just as in Bultmann transcendence is available to finite, historical human beings in the encounter with the kerygma of the crucified Christ, so in Heidegger transcendence is connected with an authentic relation to one's own death, with what Heidegger calls "Being-unto-death". For Heidegger, we might say, death is "the end of the world", but it is only thus that the totality which Heidegger calls "World" is accessible. This totality is also accessible in other ways, Heidegger tells us in What is Metaphysics?[2], in moods of boredom and joy "in the presence of the beloved"; but these (and particularly the latter) are not elaborated. It is above all in dread /Angst/ that we encounter Nothingness which is "the veil of Being".[3] That an authentic relation to our own death, to our own Nothingness, which is revealed in dread, means both the revelation of Being, of the totality of beings ("World"), and also the transcendence of There-being, can be seen when Heidegger writes that Being "is only revealed in the transcendence of There-being projected into Nothingness" /in der Transzendenz des in das Nichts

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[1] History and Eschatology (Edinburgh University Press, 1957), p.154.

[2] W Met 30f; EB 333f.

[3] W Met 52; EB 360

hinausgehaltenen Daseins/.[4] And a few paragraphs ealier Heidegger has written:

> The projection /Hineingehaltenheit/ of There-being into Nothingness on the basis /Grunde/ of hidden dread is the overcoming of the totality of beings /das Übersteigen des Seienden in Ganzen/: transcendence.[5]

It does not seem entirely out of place to refer in this context to Heidegger's "eschatology", in that There-being in authentically encountering its own end, its own death, its own Nothingness, achieves a moment of transcendence in which the "World" in its totality is encountered and is "overcome". There-being in its resolute encounter with Nothingness moves beyond the "World" and, presumably, history. Insofar as There-being, so to speak, goes out of Being into Nothingness, and thus lets Being as Being appear, and insofar as Being for Heidegger is time,[6] we seem entitled to say that There-being, though essentially finite and historical, moves beyond time and history insofar as it projects itself into Nothingness, into its own death. To this it must be immediately added that the "World" that is revealed, the Being that is lit up, in There-being's transcendence is itself in Heidegger's view finite and historical.

What we want to stress here are the connections between Heidegger's "eschatology" and the eschatology of Bultmann. Whatever metamorphoses

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[4] W Met 40; EB 346

[5] W Met 38; EB 344

[6] cf. WM 243; TM 227f.

Heidegger's thought may subsequently undergo,[7] there seems to be strong analogies between the above sketch of Heidegger's notion of transcendence by projection into death and Nothingness, and Bultmann's notion of the eschatological event of faith in which the believer is taken beyond the world and history by participation in the death of Christ in which the world is overcome (though of course the believer remains "paradoxically" related to the world and history). These connections between Bultmann and Heidegger are important when we remember the implicit but decisive rejection by Gadamer of Bultmann's eschatology. The question we must raise is whether Gadamer's rejection of Bultmann's eschatology implies a rejection of the "eschatology" we claimed to discover in Heidegger and sketched out above. What Gadamer seemed to object to in Bultmann's eschatology was that it tended to devalue communal and personal history and experience. The salvation event was the end, the annihilation, of all such history. History of course remained, but just as unredeemed and meaningless as ever. It was only in the ever-to-be-repeated moment of transcendence in which the world and history are overcome that salvation and meaning lay. Much the same sort of thing could be said about Heidegger's "eschatology" as we sketched it out above, and it seems fair to infer that insofar as our sketch is accurate Gadamer would have to distance himself from Heidegger also. Of course the question is complicated by the so-called "turn" in Heidegger. However the present writer sees no reason to believe that the "turn" makes a

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[7] The connection of death with the transcendence of There-being and the revelation of "World" seems to remain throughout Heidegger's writings, though of course it undergoes several metamorphoses. Heidegger writes, for instance, in "The Nature of Language":

> Mortals are those who can experience death as death. The animal cannot do this. But neither can the animal speak. The essential relation between death and language flashes up before us, but is still unthought.

(Unterwegs zur Sprache, p.215; On the Way to Language, p.107).

decisive difference to the issue under discussion. It is just as difficult to see how the ontological "event" /Ereignis/ of Being, in which There-being is the passive partner, is related to his or her other, ontic history and experience, as it is to see how the transcendence into Nothingness which reveals the "World" is related to human history and experience within that "World". To put the matter crudely, it is doubtful whether it is any easier to relate a quasi-mystical surrender to the grace of Being revealed in the "shrine of Nothingness"[8] to ordinary human history and experience, than it is to relate a quasi-existentialist encounter with Nothingness to such history and experience. This is not to say that such a relation cannot be made or should not be attempted, but only that to the extent Heidegger fails to make such a relation he must be subject to the same criticisms that Gadamer makes of Bultmann. For Gadamer is opposed to any sort of transcendence or eschatology which annihilates our ordinary human history and experience. He is committed to human history and experience and any transcendence in his philosophy can only be transcendence within such history, not beyond it.

Transcendence within history (if such a phrase is permissable) is a feature of the philosophy of Hegel. For Hegel a moment of transcendence, or overcoming, is possible within the immanent movement of human history and experience. This human history no doubt includes that of the individual, but Hegel is primarly concerned with the movement of World-history. The immanent movement which allows transcendence

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[8] See Poetry, Language, and Thought, pp.178f.

or overcoming is Hegel's notorious dialectic, in which "the power of the negative" is at work. This movement of transcendence, like that in Heidegger and Bultmann, is connected with death.[9] But just as Hegel's transcendence remains within the historical process, so death is no longer understood as a movement beyond history into Eternity (or Nothingness) but is transformed into a movement within history. Death (and in particular the death and resurrection of Jesus)[10] is turned into an immanent principle with describes the movement of human history and experience. Death is turned into what we might call, to adapt Goethe's well-known phrase "Stirb und werde",[11] the "die and become" principle. Progress only comes through negation, as human experience, according to Hegel, shows. We must, as the Gospels tell us, lose our life to find it.[12] But not, Hegel would add, in some other world entirely beyond history.

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9 For death and "the power of the negative" see PS 19 (HW II 25). cf. J.N. Findlay, Hegel: A Re-examination, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958), p.61.

10 For Hegel's treatment of the death of Christ, and of the role of death in the life of God see his Philosophy of Religion, trans. Speirs and Sanderson, III (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1895), 86-100 (HW XII 296-308).

11 See "Selige Sehnsucht" in the West-Östlicher Divan, cf. Penguin Selection of Goethe's poetry, p.240.

12 Edward Caird in his little book on Hegel has some pages on "dying to live" and "Christian optimism" which are well worth reading, see his Hegel, (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1883), pp.210-218.

However the finding of our own true self (which for Hegel is Absolute Spirit knowing itself through us) which we achieve by first losing it, comes only at the end, the fulfilment, of history. Hegel may wish to recognise the value of history and experience, but the immanent dialectic of history, the "die and become" principle, is only guaranteed by the coming of the end of history - not the annihilation, but the consummation of history in the parousia of Absolute Knowledge. That the negative does lead to the positive, that death does mean the becoming of new life, can only be known from the standpoint of the totality. As in Heidegger and Bultmann, eschatology means the emergence of the totality. But this totality emerges not when we, as it were, drop out of it altogether, when we are "outside" of human history and "beside" ourselves. Hegel's totality is attained from within, it is worked out from the "inside" in the immanent dialectic of history and experience, the key to which is the principle "die and become". But this principle is only validated by the attainment of the totality. The dialectical process is only justified by the result. Hegel's "optimism", his conviction that the negative dimensions of history and experience lead to a positive result, that error is merely partial and implicit truth, that "the darkness declares the glory of light", is based on his eschatology.

Gadamer, however, rejects Hegel's eschatology as firmly as he does Bultmann's (and, we infer, that of the earlier Heidegger). That here should be any end, any consummation, of his dialectic is for Gadamer out of the question, not merely in fact but in principle. The dialogue of question and answer and the play of language are, Gadamer tells us, in principle infinite, without end. Heidegger's "ontologically

positive understanding of finitude",[13] that is, the view that finitude belongs to the essence of There-being as does hiddenness to the essence of Being (and "truth"), is taken by Gadamer to mean that it is impossible in principle for the articulated whole of Being and of history to be present and available for human inspection (as it is for divine inspection, according to traditional theological ideas). This is not, let it be emphasized, because human finitude prevents us as a contingent matter of fact from getting such an articulated totality in view;[14] human nature is by definition incapable of getting such a totality in view, just as Being and history are by definition incapable of being present and revealed as an articulated totality. There quite simply is no such totality, since by definition Being includes Non-being, "truth" includes "untruth", and revelation includes concealment.

Our concern here is not to discuss Heidegger's doctrine of the finitude of Being. What concerns us ~~the~~ are the "optimistic" conclusions which Gadamer seems to draw from the doctrine. To talk of Heidegger's "ontologically positive" understanding of finitude is no doubt an apt enough way of referring to Heidegger's insistence that finitude is not merely a privative determination but is the condition of the possibility of Being. But it is important not to read too much into the term "positive". It is, after all, used in the context of ontology and its

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13 PH 215; cf. Gadamer's Introduction to the Reclam edition of Heidegger's Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes, p.105.

14 We emphasize "articulated totality" because although Heidegger says in What is Metaphysics? that we can have an experience of Being, of the totality of beings, this totality is prior to any logical determination and is quite different from Hegel's "totality of the determinations of thought". Nor, strictly speaking, can we be said to get Heidegger's totality "in view", since it is prior to "eidē", articulated forms.

extension beyond that realm must be scrutinized with great care. In particular, we must examine carefully whether Heidegger's "ontologically positive" understanding of finitude is capable of supporting a quasi-Hegelian dialectic that has abandoned Hegel's eschatology. That Gadamer retains a Hegelian "optimism" while dispensing with the ground of that optimism there can be little doubt. It is worth quoting de Waelhens on this point in extenso:

> This immense effort completely to free philosophy, the human sciences and human experience from the mortgages and postulates of disembodied rationalism has retained the latter's unfailing optimism. Thus to posit the continuity of all our history ignores violence, breach, accident, submersion, darkness and radical new beginnings. In a word, this philosophy of finitude eliminates the risks of contingency in the past and makes no mention of those in the future. In this sense it is only too clear that the crux of Gadamer's enterprise consists in interpreting Heidegger in such a way as to transform him into Hegel without a System. The transition from Hegelian dialectic to Gadamer's hermeneutics via the intermediary of Heidegger's "Welt-" and "Seinsoffenheit" in no way gives up the claims of the former to take charge of all that has been and to raise it to its truth through the truth of the whole.[15]

One cannot help but share de Waelhens' implied scepticism about the attempt to interpret Heidegger as "Hegel without a system", or to use the terms of our own discussion, Hegel without the eschatology of Absolute Knowledge. Heidegger may have given a convincing enough description of Nothingness as the veil of Being, of the totality of beings. But has he shown that negativity <u>within</u> human history and experience, <u>within</u> the totality revealed by Nothingness, is "positive"? Heidegger no doubt wants to ground the particular forms of negativity

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15 "Sur une herméneutique de l'herméneutique", <u>Revue Philosophique de Louvain</u>, vol. 60 (1962), 590.

which are found within human experience (including logical negation) in Nothingness,[16] but he can hardly be said to have done so. He makes a suggestion, he announces an intention; but, to the best of the present writer's knowledge, this intention is never elaborated in any detail. Moreover we must wonder whether Heidegger's intention of grounding particular negativities in Nothingness would result in giving them a "positive" meaning in anything like the "optimistic" sense which Gadamer seems to want. Still less can we imagine that Heidegger would ever have developed anything like a Hegelian dialectic, in the way that Gadamer does. This is not to presume to deny Gadamer's right to go the way he does, but only to register the present writer's doubt that this way is the way of Heidegger.

This doubt is supported by the views of Fruchon who emphasizes, and indeed welcomes, the divergences of Gadamer from Heidegger. With reference to Gadamer's strongly "positive" or "optimistic" reading of Heidegger, Fruchon writes:

> Perhaps we must admit that, transplanted by Gadamer, Heidegger's work acquires on the whole a meaning which is the inverse of its original meaning: it does not emphasize that all manifestation is dissimulation, but on the contrary that all dissimulation is latent presence and virtual manifestation.[17]

In Gadamer hiddenness, breach and absence in tradition tend to be viewed positively as implicit manifestation, continuity and presence. This positive turn is achieved by the taking up of negative elements into the dialectical play of language, of question and answer, where

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[16] See W Met 28f, 37; EB 330f, 341f.

[17] Fruchon, op cit., p.565.

negativity is but the spur to ever new fullness of meaning. Here indeed it seems appropriate to talk of the "die and become" principle, and to invoke the "optimism" of Hegel.

But how, as we have repeatedly asked, can Gadamer justify a Hegelian "optimism", a Hegelian confidence that totality and truth are implicit in disruption and obscurity, when his dialectic is without end? And, it must be added, not only without the already present end of Hegel's "realized eschatology", but also without even the anticipated end, the hoped-for end, of a future eschatology. Gadamer's dialectic is, as we have seen, endless in principle. Nor does it seem that Gadamer can derive support for his "optimism" by retreating (taking "a step back") into Heidegger's ontology with its "positive" estimate of finitude, because not only is that ontology only problematically related to ontic history and experience (any departure from which Gadamer appears to condemn, presumably as "anti-human"); it is also by no means as obviously "positive" as Gadamer appears to think it is.[18] Whichever way Gadamer turns, it seems that the apparent lack of satisfactory eschatology (or indeed of any eschatology whatsoever) casts doubt on his ability to justify his "optimism".

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18. cf. Part One, Chapter 1(a) above on Gadamer's interpretation of Heidegger's term "throwness". Indeed, one can argue that whatever grounds there are for "optimism" in Heidegger are precisely in his own kind of eschatology, his expectation of the dawning of a new epoch of Being - an expectation which Gadamer explicitly refuses to share; see WM xxiii; TM xxv.

(b) Gadamer's "theodicy"

It does not seem illegitimate to the present writer to pose this problem of the relation between Gadamer's so-called "optimism" and the negativity which pervades human experience[1] in the widest possible terms. Does Gadamer inherit from Hegel some sort of theodicy? Gadamer of course would claim to be doing philosophy rather than theology; but inasmuch as Gadamer inherits Hegel's "optimism" he inherits also a connection with theodicy, for Hegel's philosophical "optimism" is merely theodicy transposed into the sphere of philosophy.[2] Gadamer indeed seems a little sceptical of Hegel's claim to demonstrate "the march of God through the world". In Hegel's Dialectic he writes:

> . . . Hegel taught how to recognize reason in history even in spite of the terrible contradictions which the confusion of human history and fate places before our eyes. He brought into the realm of thought what had previously been left to faith and trust in Providence because it was impenetrable to human knowledge and insight.
>
> Dialectic was the magic charm enabling him to find necessity in the erratic movement of human history . . . [3]

The tone of this passage seems to place some distance between Gadamer and Hegel, but it is perhaps significant that Gadamer does not actually say in what respects he thinks Hegel's project was mistaken. Gadamer's apparent reluctance in this passage to state clearly his own position with regard to Hegel is perhaps because the relation between Gadamer and Hegel here is rather ambiguous. For Gadamer too wants to say that reason is at work in history, though reason for Gadamer is

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[1] Experience is essentially negative for Gadamer, see WM 335ff; TM 316ff; also Part One, Chapter 3 above.

[2] See Introduction to the Philosophy of History, trans. J. Sibree, in J. Loewenberg (ed.), Hegel Selections (New York: Scribner's, 1957), p.357 (HW IX 20).

[3] HD 87; HD (ET) 105.

intimately connected with language: "Language is the language of reason itself" (WM 379; TM 363). The nature of this mysterious intimacy is never elaborated. However, from Gadamer's clear statement that there is such an intimacy we may perhaps infer that when Gadamer talks of language as grounding and validating the historical play of tradition with its continual dialogue of question and answer, then reason and its dialectical unfolding in history cannot be too far away. We must regret that Gadamer allows the line dividing himself from Hegel on these issues to be so fuzzy and uncertain.

But whatever the precise relation between Gadamer and Hegel with regard to the question of reason in history, it seems undeniable that the central problems of theodicy are "taken up" into Gadamer's philosophy. It is Gadamer himself, after all, who at a crucial stage in the presentation of his philosophy brings in the idea of "pathei mathos", of learning through suffering.[4] But without a satisfactory eschatology, it is difficult to see how suffering, how a <u>particular</u> experience of negativity, can be confidently asserted to be in any sense productive. Gadamer may reject the "teleological" relation of experience to knowledge (and in Hegel's case to Absolute Knowledge), and wish to exalt "experience" as an end in itself. But how can he be so sure that the negativity of a particular experience is not symply <u>dysteleological</u>?

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[4] See WM 339; TM 320; see also Part One, Chapter 3 above.

(c) Two types of eschatology in the Christian tradition

We must postpone further discussion of these questions until the next chapter ("Providence and Play"), and conclude this chapter by looking briefly at the problem of eschatology in Gadamer's philosophy in the light of the Christian tradition.

It seems a pity that Gadamer indentifies the Christian postition with Bultmann's eschatology, for the understanding of eschatology which the Christian tradition contains is far richer and more complex than such a one-sided understanding as Bultmann's would suggest.[1] It would be difficult to do justice to this aspect of the tradition in a whole book, and to devote a few paragraphs to it is almost an impertinence. However we will attempt to show one or two of the more obvious ways in which the Christian tradition impinges on the problems we have indicated in Gadamer's work.

Whereas Gadamer rejects both types of eschatology we have discussed, i.e. the end as sheer transcendence of "this world" and history by the individual, and the end as consummation of the history of this world, Christian faith traditionally affirms both of these (though often one or the other may predominate).

The end as sheer transcendence of "this world" and history by the individual belongs to what we may call the Platonic strand in the Christian tradition. Plato's definition of philosophy in the Phaedo as "training to die" (67 d,e; 80 e) can be seen as finding its fulfilment in the Neo-Platonic and Christian mysticism which, it will be recalled, Gadamer claims as a preparation for his own philosophy. (WM 461; TM 443) Heidegger too stands in a peculiar relation to this

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[1] This is not to suggest that Bultmann's concept of "the eschatological event of faith" is not a profound insight as far as it goes.

tradition. Like Plato, he places death at the centre of his philosophy. Of course "death" has a rather different meaning for the two thinkers. The "dying" with which philosophy is concerned according to Plato in the Phaedo involves stripping off the accidents which encumber the "essence" of man, so leaving the unchanging immortal soul pure and intact. There is no absolute Non-Being in anything like Heidegger's sense. For Plato, as for any good "essentialist", Non-being is merely Not-Being, is difference in this or that respect.[2] "Death" for Plato seems to mean the stripping off of particular accidents, not the encounter with Nothingness itself. But despite these differences, and despite Heidegger's view that in Plato "metaphysics" takes its rise,[3] there still seem (at least to the present writer) to be certain affinities between these two thinkers who place death and transcendence at the centre of philosophy.[4] In fact Heidegger's philosophy has been able to contribute to the further development of that style of theology (predominantly Roman Catholic) which stresses death as of great importance for the soul's achieving (or failing to achieve) transcendence[5] - a theme which is rooted in the Christian-Platonic mystical tradition (though usually this tradition is, as Gadamer says (WM 461; TM 443), mediated through Scholasticism).

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[2] See the Sophist 249e-259e; cf. Taylor, op.cit. pp.386-389; cf. HD 21; HD(ET) 22. Also helpful is G.R.G. Mure's "Introduction to Hegel" (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940), pp.117ff.

[3] For Heidegger on Plato, see W.J. Richardson, op.cit. pp.301-308 and J.L. Mehta, The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), pp.147ff.

[4] It is always easier to dismiss Plato's talk of the immortal soul than to attempt the task it presents us with. The Phaedo may be "logically odd" or "onto-theo-logical" but it makes (at least on the present writer) a profound existentiell claim.

[5] e.g. Karl Rahner and Ladislaus Boros.

However this emphasis on death and transcendence is not limited to Roman Catholic theology. Despite the coolness towards "Plato and the mystics" in Protestant theology in general and dialectical theology in particular,[6] there seem to be certain affinities between, for example, Bultmann's eschatology and the mysticism of the Christian-Platonic tradition. This need not altogether surprise us given Luther's familiarity with and, to a certain extent, dependence on, the mystical tradition.[7] Indeed it could be argued that the affinities between the Lutheran tradition revived by dialectical theology, and the mystical aspect of the Roman Catholic scholastic tradition emerge in the thought of Heidegger, the former Roman Catholic seminarian working in Protestant Marburg.[8] It is interesting to approach the faith versus works question that has all too often polarised Protestant and Roman Catholic from the prespective of the role of "death" in theology. The question asked by the Protestant could perhaps be put in this way: Can the "death" of self ever be a "work"? Could one ever be "good" at "dying"? Can "death" ever be a human "achievement"?[9] However it is not our business here to get embroiled in the faith versus the works issue. Nor need we go to the monks and mystics to understand the role

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6 One only needs to think of Brunner's The Mediator where "mysticism" is used almost as a term of abuse.

7 See The Theologia Germanica of Martin Luther, trans. with introduction and commentary by B. Hoffmann (London: SPCK, 1980), p.xvi, pp.14-20.

8 Though (to parody Sartre) not every former seminarian working in Marburg is Martin Heidegger! For the affinities between Bultmann and Heidegger, see section (a) of this chapter.

9 One might surmise that some such question may have been involved in the "turn" of Heidegger from Being and Time to the later works.

of "death" in Christian life. That belief that Christian life is "a training to die" is to be found in ordinary Christian piety (though not necessarily expressed in these words of Plato). The idea that experiences of negativity in human life can be a way of sharing in Christ's sufferings and death (and hence be "the way of transcendence") is at least as old as Paul (2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 3:7-11) and as new as the last time we heard the remark (often casually devoid of any religious intention) that "we all have our cross to bear".

It is interesting to compare this positive evaluation of the negative moment of experience in the Christian tradition with Gadamer's stress on the role of the essentially negative moment of experience which leads us to the "true experience" which is an end in itself.[10] From a Christian perspective Gadamer's "positive" evaluation of the negative moment of experience might be at least understandable if the "true experience" from which it derives its value were in some way understood as a moment of transcendence. We might picture to ourselves some Heideggerian version of this where particular negative experiences derive value from their relation to Nothingness as the veil of Being, as the realm of transcendence.[11] But Gadamer rejects any such transcendence. Indeed the "true experience" he talks of is precisely the experience that there is no transcendence. Gadamer turns his back on the eschatology of transcendence of the Christian-Platonic tradition

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[10] See Part One, Chapter 3 above.

[11] There are in fact some hints in this direction in Heidegger's evocative use of the term "sacrifice" in the Epilogue to What is Metaphysics? (W Met 49ff; EB 358f). Heidegger talks, for instance, of the gift "of the noble poverty in which the freedom of the sacrifice hides its own preciousness" (W Met 50; EB 359).

and returns to what he says is the experience and insight which lies at the heart of Greek tragedy. (WM 339; TM 320). Gadamer is of course perfectly entitled to go back to what he sees as the fundamental insight of Greek tragedy (and thus apparently to follow in the footsteps of Nietzsche). But he seems thereby to forfeit his entitlement to share the "optimism" of the Christian-Platonic tradition.[12]

However in the Christian tradition the Platonic, mystical strand, which can all-too-easily slip into a dangerous "otherworldliness", is balanced by the faith that this world and human history are important to God. The "this-wordly" strand of the Christian tradition is usually traced back to the Old Testament, and is given its full theological expression in the doctrine of the Incarnation. A strongly Incarnational theology will usually stress the immanence of God, that is, the idea that God as Spirit is at work in this world and in history. There is a strong faith in Divine Providence, a conviction that there is a pattern and meaning in history and that the world is moving towards a consummation in which God will be all in all. The most ambitious statement (and for many the most arrogant over-statement) of such an Incarnational theology is arguably Hegel's philosophy of history, which describes "the march of God through the world". Like Gadamer, most Christians will reject Hegel's claim to demonstrate the workings of Providence. Like Gadamer they will reject Hegel's claim to Absolute Knowledge and will

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12 For some penetrating (and highly subversive) insights into the relation between "pessimistic" Greek tragedy and "optimistic" Greek rationality, see Nietzsche's "Attempt at self criticism" in The Birth of Tragedy (and The Case of Wagner), trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), pp.21f.

stress human finitude. But unlike Gadamer they will understand that finitude to mean that while we may not comprehend the pattern and meaning in history, there nevertheless is such a pattern and meaning. This pattern may not be as "logical" as the one Hegel (and for that matter the Marxists) claim to discover, and it may have more to do with the history of Jahweh and Israel in the Old Testament than with the Greek logos or reason transposed into history. But there is nevertheless believed to be meaning in the movement of history, and this belief is grounded in the faith and the hope that this movement is "teleologically" related to the fulfilment of history in the Kingdom of God. Gadamer seems to share this Christian faith that the movement of history is meaningful, only he rejects any "teleological" relation of this movement to the end of history. But without such a relation to the end, history, from the Christian point of view, is meaningless. Detached from any eschatology of consummation, Gadamer's "optimism" is, from the Christian perspective, quite groundless.[13]

In the Christian tradition, these two eschatologies, the eschatology of transcendence and the eschatology of consummation, are usually found side by side, though each may carry traces of the influence of the other.[14] Often one predominates and it may even eclipse the other. How precisely they are related to one another is not immediately clear, and is certainly beyond the scope of this study. But at best, we may suggest,

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[13] For discussion of a legitimate "groundlessness" in Christian theology, see the following chapter.

[14] So-called "apocalyptic eschatology", for instance, seems to blend together the two types of eschatology. History, is moving under divine guidance towards an end, but this end seems to be more the annihilation of "this world" and its history than its consummation.

they complement each other. And when it comes to theodicy arguably both are needed. That the sufferings of this world may offer a way to participate in the death of Christ and so to have a foretaste of eternal life beyond time and space may be one Christian answer to the problem of human suffering.[15] But on its own it can lead to a dangerous and even morbid exaltation of suffering for its own sake. In a peculiar way Gadamer exposes himself to this danger when he makes experience (by definition negative) an end in itself. In contrast to Gadamer, Christian faith holds that the experience of suffering is "teleologically" related to something beyond itself. Christian faith not only believes that suffering is a way of sharing in the saving death of Christ; it also believes that particular experiences of suffering have their place in the overall pattern of the life of both individual and community. This does not necessarily mean that God wills this suffering for an individual or a group "for their own good". The faith is rather that this suffering is never entirely meaningless, never sheerly dysteleological. That the contrary often seems to be the case is the agony of any Christian theodicy.

In this chapter we have not been trying to suggest that Christian faith has all the easy answers, nor that Christian theology has a well-packaged theodicy on offer, with all the loose ends neatly tied up. Christian theodicy is a difficult and perilous undertaking, even when it has both the eschatologies we have outlined. We are merely asking

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15 One thinks in this context of Simone Weil (also, in her own way, quite a Platonist), see "The Love of God and Affliction", in Waiting on God (London: Collins (Fontana), 1959), pp.76-94.

how it stands with Gadamer's "optimism", his implicit theodicy, when he has neither of these eschatologies. Our suggestion is that Gadamer should either dare to go the way of Nietzsche and to abandon the "optimism" he derives from the Christian-Platonic tradition; or he should take another look at the types of eschatology within that tradition to see whether they might not, after all, be given philosophical expression.

C H A P T E R F I V E

PROVIDENCE AND PLAY (GADAMER AND THE PROBLEM OF TELEOLOGY)

(a) Philosophy and Play

The set of problems which we include under the heading of "Providence and Play" has already been touched on in the previous chapter when we wondered how Gadamer's "optimism" could stand up in the absence of an eschatology of consummation. How, we asked, could Gadamer justify such "optimism" when history was not "teleologically related" to its consummation? The rejection of any such a "teleological relation" which takes human history and experience beyond itself is a fundamental and recurring feature of Gadamer's philosophy. The essentially negative movement of experience (which Hegel rightly saw, according to Gadamer) is not, as in Hegel, "teleologically related" to knowledge. Gadamer also rejects teleology in his treatment of Beauty. According to Fruchon's interpretation of the final chapter of Truth and Method,[1] there are two aspects or sides to the Platonic doctrine of Beauty; one is orientated towards a hierarchical "ontology of measure", while the other is orientated towards what Fruchon calls an "ontology of light". The former is associated by Fruchon with a teleological vision of reality inasmuch as the perception of Beauty is the perception of the well-proportioned orderliness of the forms which constitute reality - the supreme visible image of which is the cosmos itself. Here, though ambiguously and only in germ, Fruchon sees that anthropocentrism which can only approach reality in terms of the

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[1] See Part One, Chapter 9(c) above.

ordering capacity of the human mind - irrespective of whether "nature" is seen as intimately related to, or recalcitrantly resistant of, that ordering[2] capacity. As Fruchon says, Gadamer rejects this teleological approach to Beauty and rediscovers in Platonism another, quite different, approach to Beauty which sees it rather in terms of light. Like light, Beauty is a radiance which is its own source (it is not conferred by us, whatever modern subjectivistic aesthetics might say). It plays on whatever is beautiful and captivates and enthralls us with this playing. Beauty, like light, is always already playing before our ordering minds can go to work.

Teleology, then, is connected by Gadamer with subjectivism; and the overcoming of subjectivism which it is his intention to carry out in aesthetics, the human sciences, and ultimately in the most fundamental and universal sphere of all, that of ontology, involves also an overcoming of teleology. In all these areas teleology is replaced by the concept of play, or the game /"Spiel" covers both/. The concept of play is first elaborated in Part One of Truth and Method as the model for understanding the relation between the work of art and both those who perform it (if this is applicable) and those who enjoy it. Play also emerges in the movement backwards and forwards, the dialogue or interplay which is the model for understanding the Understanding operative in the human sciences. Play is also the model for understanding Understanding as such; it is in the play of language that Gadamer seeks to ground his "hermeneutic ontology".

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[2] "Ordering" is a conveniently ambiguous term for it carries not only the meaning of "arranging", but also that of "commanding"; and this latter meaning hints at the desire of the "subjectivism" or "anthropocentrism", which Heidegger and Gadamer seek to expose, to dominate the world.

The concept of play is clearly of central importance to Gadamer's philosophical project, and demands to be treated in a little more detail. In the section of Truth and Method in which he explores the "ontology of the work of art", Gadamer takes play as the "guiding thread" to his ontological investigations, and devotes a chapter to the concept of play. (WM 97-105; TM 91-99). The main point that Gadamer wants to make here is that play is wrongly understood if we approach it in terms of the attitude of the playing subject - as it has been approached in modern times, Gadamer claims, chiefly under the influence of Kant and Schiller. According to Gadamer, the real subject of the game is not the player, but the game itself. It is the game itself that makes a game a game and dictates its movement, not the consciousness of the player.[3] Similarly, the game is not "teleologically" related to anything outside of itself. It may have the "purpose" of relaxing the player, but this "purpose" can only be achieved when it is forgotten by the player and when he or she submits to the internal dictates of the game. The player who says "It's only a game" or "I'm only doing it for the good of my health" steps outside of the immediacy of the game and thereby spoils the game. He or she is a "spoil-sport". The surrender of the self-conscious subject with its aims and goals is the only way to experience the joy of playing. As we saw above,[4] the game gives enrichment through loss of self; though whether this characteristic of the game allows of a universal application we doubted, a point to which we shall return.

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[3] As evidence for Gadamer's claim there might be adduced what everyone who takes part in a sport knows, and what has recently received a certain amount of attention and even been put to practical use by some coaches - the player's self-consciousness merely interferes with his or her performance. If you are watching yourself playing you will play less well.

[4] See Part Two, Chapter 2.

This overcoming of the self-conscious subject in play also means a different attitude to nature. Nature is no longer the mere Other, the "Non-ego", which we must subject to our goals and aims. In play we come close to nature, we participate in its playfulness. Indeed, as Gadamer says in a rather startling passage, it is not so much that nature "plays" by analogy with our playing; the opposite is the case:

> The fact that the mode of being of play is so close to the moving form of nature allows an important methodological conclusion. It is obviously not the case that animals also /i.e. in addition to human beings/ play and that one can say figuratively that water and light play. Rather we can say the opposite, that man too plays. His playing is also a natural process. The meaning of his playing is also, just because and insofar as it is nature, pure self-representation. Therefore in the end it is quite meaningless in this realm to distinguish between literal and metaphorical usage.[5]

The play of human beings as of nature Gadamer calls "Selbstdarstellung". In the English translation this is rendered "self-representation", and while it is difficult to think of a better alternative,[6] it must be said that this hardly does justice to the German term. "Selbstdarstellung" suggests the placing (stellen) of oneself there (da) in the playing of the play. Just as for Heidegger "Da-sein" is the "there" of Being, so Gadamer's "Selbstdarstellung" suggests that the player places himself at the disposal of the game, that he is the "there" of the game which after all cannot be played without players. Where Gadamer seems to part company with Heidegger is that whereas for Heidegger "being there" for the play of Being seems to be a prerogative of human beings, Gadamer seems to want to identify human beings with nature rather than to distinguish them from it. While

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[5] WM 100; TM 94

[6] "Self-display" might be one.

Heidegger perhaps pays too little attention to the analogies between the self-display of human play and of natural play, Gadamer in the above passage[7] seems to the present writer to underestimate the differences between human and natural play. However although Heidegger may emphasize the difference of man from nature rather than their unity, there is nevertheless at least one passage where he makes use of an image[8] from nature to point to the authentic mode of Being for human beings. This passage in particular and Heidegger's use of the word "play" in general are worth referring to because they can be presumed to have exerted a considerable influence on Gadamer. In Der Satz vom Grund (the title refers to "the principle of sufficient reason") Heidegger comments on the following couplet by Angelus Silesius:

Without Why

> The rose is without why; it blossoms because it blossoms;
> It cares not for itself, nor does it ask if it is seen.

According to Heidegger, the rose is first of all like[8] Being as physis in that it is the simple process of emerging out of itself.[9] Secondly, Heidegger says, ". . . man, in the most concealed ground of his essence, never truly is until he is in his way like[8] the rose - without why".[10]

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[7] Which, to the best of the present writer's knowledge, remains unelaborated except for a rather cryptic paragraph in a later essay, see PH 236f; KS III 217f.

[8] Whether the distinction between literal and metaphorical has broken down the present writer would not like to say. The quotation from Heidegger below suggests some sort of analogy of Being.

[9] On this and what follows see John D. Caputo's two part article "Meister Eckhart and the later Heidegger: The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought", Journal of the History of Philosophy, XII (1974), 479-494 and XIII (1975), 61-80, especially pp.67f.

[10] Der Satz vom Grund, p.72f; quoted in Caputo, op.cit., p.68.

Heidegger says later:

> The because is swallowed up in a play. The play is without why. It plays as long as it plays. There remains only play: the highest and the deepest.[11]

Clearly we need not look much further for the origins of Gadamer's concept of play. Helmut Kuhn remarks in his examination of Truth and Method[12] that Gadamer's concept of play "can only be understood in terms of its implicit relation to Heidegger".[13] Others too may have influenced Gadamer, like Huizinga for instance, whose classic study Homo Ludens Gadamer refers to. But Heidegger's attempt to overcome subjectivism and his talk of the mirror-play /Spiegel-Spiel/ of the world[14] are clearly the foundations of Gadamer's concept of play. And the rejection of teleology which goes hand in hand with the attack ~~of~~ on subjectivism also has roots in Heidegger for whom, as we saw, "the because is swallowed up in play".[15]

However it must be emphasized that Heidegger rejects the concept of teleology (though he does not use that phrase) primarily with reference to ontology. What he wants to stress is that Being is not "teleologically related" to anything beyond itself. The "World" is not grounded in anything beyond itself, e.g. in a highest being. Being is groundless, and

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11 Der Satz vom Grund, p.188; quoted in Caputo, op.cit., p.68.

12 "Wahrheit und geschichtliche Verstehen", Historische Zeitschrift 193 (1961), 376-389.

13 Kuhn, op.cit., p.388.

14 See Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, p.180.

15 The question how Heidegger's conception of There-being as the being who asks "why the why?" (Introduction to Metaphysics, p.5, see Part One, Chapter 5 above) is related to the conception of There-being as living "without why" takes us to the heart of the problem of Heidegger's "turn". But it is beyond our scope to follow this up here.

to say even that it is self-grounding would still be to reduce it to a being.[16] As Mehta writes, "Being itself rests, not on anything that can be described in terms of ground, reason or cause but in the mystery of play . . . ".[17] What this groundlessness of Being means for particular beings is not entirely clear. What is clear is that the play Heidegger is concerned with is the play of the "World", of Being, of the "totality of beings"; and to live "without why" means an ontological comportment of human beings (if we may be permitted to use such a phrase). The playfulness which Heidegger talks of has to do primarily with a relation to the totality of beings, to what is first and last, to "the highest and the deepest"; it refers to the capacity of human beings to participate in the play of the "World". It is only secondarily that this playfulness might be discovered in our ontic comportment towards particular things, events and people. This latter playing is, we suggest, an analogy, an image, perhaps a reminiscence and a foretaste, of the play which is "the highest and the deepest". But we must carefully distinguish these two kinds of play, and insist on the difference between them despite the fact that the play which takes place in our human history and experience can become, through participation[18] in the "highest and deepest" play,

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16 For a summary of Heidegger's Der Satz vom Grund see Mehta, op.cit., p.92, note 13.

17 ibid. cf. Heidegger's alteration in Der Satz vom Grund of Leibniz' "Cum deus calculat, fit mundus" to "While God plays, the world comes to be"; quoted in The Piety of Thinking, p.145.

18 Discussion of the theme of "participation" in Heidegger is beyond our scope here. But Heidegger seems to have something to offer to Christian theology's discussion of analogy and idolatry.

an analogy, an image, a reminiscence and foretaste[19] of the latter. To ignore the difference can lead to a confusion which does injury both to the dignity of human suffering and striving, and to the majesty of that "highest and deepest" play.

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[19] We might suggest (adapting Tillich) that we should not say "merely an analogy, image, reminiscence or foretaste", but always "not less than an analogy, image, etc. .

(b) Theology and Play

In our examination of the problem of eschatology in Gadamer, it proved helpful to discuss the relation between Gadamer's philosophy and the Christian tradition. This gives grounds for hoping that a dialogue with Christian theology may prove equally fruitful in connection with the problem of teleology and its relation to play. There seems to be a certain amount of material on the importance of play both in Scripture (the lilies of the field in Matthew 6:25ff seem to be the ancestors of Angelus Silesius' rose) and in tradition; and it is on this material that the "theologies of play" of recent times have built.[1] Our discussion of teleology and play in Gadamer will make particular reference to one of these, Jürgen Moltmann's essay "The First Liberated Men in Creation", to which the English publishers have added the title Theology and Joy.

Though he does not use the term "teleology", it is Moltmann's intention in this essay to challenge both the subjection of theology to the idea of purpose, and the precedence accorded to ethical categories over aesthetic ones in theology. Christian life and theology can become, as the jargon has it, too "achievement-oriented". Moltmann seems to identify work with the "works" of the traditional Protestant antithesis of "faith and works". Works as "works" is law, while play acquires the attributes of the gospel, bringing grace, freedom and joy. The purposes of God for his Creation are not purposes at all, according to Moltmann:

> In the Christian way of thinking, the so-called final purpose of history is then no purpose at all. It is the liberation of life which the law had made subject to purposes and achievement, to the all-quickening joy of God.[2]

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[1] For a list of these see Moltmann's Theology and Joy (London: SCM, 1973), p.88.

[2] Moltmann, op.cit., p.46.

Moltmann quotes approvingly the biologist and philosopher Buytendijk (whom Gadamer also refers to):

> 'The further we progress in the analysis of existence,' writes Buytendijk, 'the clearer it becomes . . . that man also has the possibility of being played with rather than playing, of being the one who is sheltered by the game. This leads to a mysterious transformation. Man becomes aware that the encompassing, loving ground of his existence is playing a wondrous game with him. It is - as the poet Charles Peguy has shown us - the game of Qui perd Gagne, the loser wins.'[3]

We quote in extenso this passage of Buytendijk which Moltmann quotes, because it comes so close to Gadamer's message. Indeed Moltmann himself can become almost Heideggerian at times:

> Play as a world symbol /this phrase is actually the title of a book by Eugen Fink/ does contain archaic conceptions but goes beyond the idea of world as history, if we extend this concept /i.e. play as a world symbol/ to the eschatology of being . . . Play as a world symbol goes beyond the categories of doing, having and achieving and leads us into the categories of being, of authentic human existence and demonstrative rejoicing in it.[4]

Heidegger of course would never oppose history and Being in this way. And the antithesis of "being or having" is a commonplace of existentialist philosophy. But coming from a theologian whose usual philosophical allies are Marxian thinkers and Hegel, this passage and others like it are worthy of remark.[5]

However despite all his talk about play as the approriate theological category for speaking about the life of God and the life of the Christian community, Moltmann is well aware of the inadequacies of such talk when confronted with the stark reality of the crucifixion of Jesus. His awareness of these inadequacies emerges clearly when he quotes and

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[3] Moltmann, op.cit., p.46.

[4] ibid.

[5] Though Erich Fromm, on whom Marx is a seminal influence, has recently published a book entitled To have or to be? (London: Abacus, 1979). We should probably not attach too much importance to Moltmann's apparent change of partners. He tends to plunder philosophy for his own theological needs rather than to engage in sustained and rigorous dialogue.

then comments on a sentence by Hugo Rahner:

> 'What at the surface appears as fate, as suffering, or - in the Christian sense - as participation in the seemingly senseless destruction of the cross, is for the mystic, whose vision penetrates all veils, the wondrously conceived game of an eternal love, a game so painstaking and manifold in its conception that only love could have devised it.' Can we really talk about the cross of Jesus just as a 'veil' of suffering, tortured flesh through which we can see a pleasant sky illuminated by the brilliant rays of the sun of God's love? I think we should literally and sincerely leave the cross out of the game. In spite of Bach, the dying agonies of Jesus do not fit the categories of song.[6]

Whether or not Moltmann is being fair to Hugo Rahner, he certainly has a vivid sense of how inappropriate certain ways of talking about "the eternal play of God's love" can be when we remember the horror of Golgotha. This sense Moltmann shares with a much greater German theologian whose thought also has at its heart a profound meditation on Golgotha. Hegel writes in the Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit:

> Thus the life of God and divine knowledge may indeed be spoken of as love's playing with itself; yet this idea descends to the level of edification and even insipidity when seriousness, pain and the patience and the work of the negative have no place in it.[7]

Moltmann's solution to this difficulty is, as we saw, to take the Cross"out of the game". He makes this point again a few pages later:

> The cross of Christ does not therefore belong to the game itself, but it makes possible a new game of freedom.[8]

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[6] Moltmann, op.cit., p.50.

[7] Hegel: Texts and Commentary, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1965), p.30; cf. PS 10 (HW II 15).

[8] Moltmann, op.cit., p.53.

It is beyond our scope here to pursue the theological implications of the move Moltmann makes here - that of taking the Cross "out of the game". What we must draw attention to is the fact that the game is now grounded in the Cross. Without this connection with the Cross, with death, play is reduced to mere frivolity,[9] and to talk about it is "mere edification and insipidity" - or even worse, as Moltmann says:

> Apart from this harsh theological dialectic of death and life, destruction and reconciliation, anthropological and religious game theories always end up close to the edge of faddism and snobbism. Since they do not take death seriously, life does not really get into the game of freedom.[10]

To what extent Gadamer is guilty of such an accusation must in the end be decided by the individual reader. However it cannot be ignored that (as we have pointed out on more than one occasion) Gadamer has surprisingly little to say about death and "the power of the negative".[11] This is all the more surprising as death and negativity play an important role both in the traditions in which Gadamer stands - those of Christianity and of Platonism, and also in the thinkers from whom he derives the foundations of his own philosophy - Hegel and Heidegger. In particular, we noted the reluctance of Gadamer to have anything to do with what we called an eschatology of transcendence which places a strong emphasis on death as the way of transcendence. It is perhaps no accident that the concept of play should be especially at home in the mystical tradition with its eschatology of transcendence. Perhaps authentic play is only possible on

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9 To use a distinction N. O'Donoghue makes in the essay "Playfulness" in his Heaven in Ordinarie (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1979).

10 Moltmann, op.cit., p.54.

11 But cf. the essay "Der Tod als Frage" (1972) (KS IV 62-73). This essay contains some interesting reflections on death, but it hardly makes it the fundamental theme that it is for Christianity and Platonism, and also for Hegel and Heidegger.

the basis of such an eschatology, and to reject the eschatology is to make us doubt the seriousness of the play.

But while "the game" might be justified on the basis of the cross, while play may find its fulfilment in an eschatology of transcendence, we must still ask what this means for teleology. Is teleology simply annulled by play? In theological terms, is the law simply cancelled out by the gospel? In this essay Moltmann seems to come very close to answering these questions in the affirmative. Moltmann and Gadamer seem to share what might be seen as an excessive rejection of teleology, and this rejection carries with it dangers of its own. Just as we suggested that Christian theology needs both types of eschatology, the eschatology of consummation as well as the eschatology of transcendence, if it is to begin to cope with the problems of evil and suffering, so, we may suggest, the problem of evil and suffering demand not only the category of play, but also that of teleology. The existential touchstone of any theory of play is human suffering. Unless that theory has a proper relation to teleology, to ultimate ends and purposes, then we may find it offensively frivolous.

While the accusation of frivolity could hardly be laid against Moltmann, his exaltation of play at the expense of teleology does lead him into what is, in the present writer's view, a dangerously one-sided position. He writes:

> The history of the passion of the world . . . has no purpose and does not lead to a theodicy . . . . The tortured question in suffering and dying, "Why?", reveals its dignity in that it does not permit an explanation. It can be answered only by a new creation in which there shall be neither mourning nor crying nor pain, for the former things have passed away (Rev. 21:4). The passion of Christ in the midst of the world's passion ending in the resurrection of the one whom the world crucified is the incarnate assurance of the dawn of that other history of joy in the very midst of the world's unanswered suffering.[12]

There seems to the present writer to be peculiar "otherworldliness" in these lines which is a little unexpected from Moltmann. His eschatology seems to approximate to the eschatology of transcendence which we sketched out in the last chapter, particularly in its bringing together human suffering and the passion of Christ. Actually Moltmann seems to be drawing here on the tradition of "apocalyptic eschatology", but this eschatology is, as we suggested above,[13] really an eschatology of transcendence despite its reference to history. Transcendence is simply located in an "absolute future" rather than an "eternal present". But in both cases "this world" and its history are annihilated with the parousia of the "other world", of "that other history of joy". But talk of "another history" (which has a strongly Barthian ring) seems to leave this history just as meaningless as it seems to be for Bultmann. That transcendence is conceived in communal rather than individual terms hardly affects the point at issue. Moltmann seems to have more in common with the mystics than one might at first suspect.[14] All this is

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[12] Moltmann, op.cit., p.55.

[13] Part Two, Chapter 4(c) note 14.

[14] cf. Moltmann's article "Theology of Mystical Experience", Scottish Journal of Theology, vol.32 (1979), 501-520.

of course rather ironical since the basic intention of Moltmann is to stress this-worldly activity in the power of the Spirit, the taking up of the pain and negation of this world into the life of the Crucified God, in opposition to any pietistic (and quietistic) individualism.

What our brief examination of Moltmann's essay seems to show is that to exalt play at the expense of teleology is to dispense with an eschatology of consummation. Providence (that is, God's guiding hand in this history) is replaced by play. And, as is clear from the last quotation from Moltmann's essay, theodicy too is abandoned. There is independent confirmation, from quite a different quarter, of this tendency of an overemphasis on play to lead to the abandoning of theodicy. In an essay[15] on the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, whose concept of play is derived largely from Nietzsche and Heidegger, Fergus Kerr toys with the idea of dispensing with "onto-theo-dicy". Kerr talks of "a joyful acceptance of the sheer gratuitousness - the 'grace' - of what is and what happens".[16] He continues:

> The notion of playsomeness rather than the rationality of the world is not unfamiliar in the Christian tradition.[17]

Given that Kerr is here being rather tentative, one must nevertheless ask whether this playsomeness of the world stands up in face of human suffering. It is one thing joyfully to accept the sheer gratuitousness of Creation; but it seems to the present writer to be quite another

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[15] "Derrida's Wake", New Blackfriars vol.55 no.563 (October 1974) 449-460.

[16] Kerr, op.cit., p.460

[17] ibid.

joyfully to accept (and, more importantly, to exhort others joyfully to accept) the sheer gratuitousness of particular events, and especially particular negative experiences of suffering. That the world and history happen is doubtless the "wonder of wonders"; what happens in the world and history can make us wonder, not that it all means, ~~but~~ but what it all means.

There seems to the present writer to be a great temptation for Christian theology in our time to re-interpret Providence in terms of play, to transmute the God-givenness of particular historical events (Providence) into the God-givenness of the world and history as such (Creation). And it seems to the present writer that Gadamer has, despite the subtlety of his attempts to avoid doing so, nevertheless succumbed to the philosophical equivalent of this theological temptation. Gadamer's "optimism" seems to depend on the transference of the "graciousness" of ontological givenness (which he derives from Heidegger) to the ontic givenness of particular events which befall people and texts. However our criticism both of Gadamer and of those theologians who seem to succumb to this temptation does not intend to underestimate either their sincerity or the power of this temptation. The doctrine of Providence, the doctrine that God is at work in the particular events of our history and experience, is one of the most difficult to uphold in our age. There is a real danger that we may avoid the temptation mentioned above only at the price of the sacrifice of our intellectual honesty. However the present writer can only register his conviction that Christian theology and philosophy must, despite the enormous difficulties involved, stick to the task of interpreting the doctrine of Providence and refuse to trasmute it into play. Only thus can there be that authentic theodicy which is the inescapable burden of any Christian theology. And here, perhaps, we can still learn from Hegel.

(c) Teleology and Play

The preceding pages may give the impression that, in the present writer's view, we are obliged to choose between either teleology or play. This short section will attempt to show that a complete theology or philosophy will contain both teleology and play. Reality, we will suggest, may begin and end in play; but there must always be room in the middle for purpose, for work, for teleology. Teleology, we will suggest, is that which mediates play.

Much of the Biblical material which had to do with playfulness seems to be concerned with the End, the consummation, of God's history with his people. At the risk of committing exegetical naïvetés, we might mention first of all the association of the banquet or feast with the arrival of the Kingdom in the New Testament. Then there is Jesus' saying that to those who are child-like belongs the Kingdom of God (Mark 10;15); one of the suggestions of this richly evocative pericope is that there is an element of playfulness in the Kingdom. In the Old Testament some of the material concerning the glorious End-time depicts an innocent playfulness where all creatures live together in peace and harmony (Isaiah 11:6-9). And given the closeness of human play and natural play which finds expression in Jesus' lilies of the field and Angelus Silesius' rose, it is worth quoting Isaiah 55:12:

> The mountains and the hills before you
> shall break forth into singing,
> and all the trees of the field shall
> clap their hands.

There is less Biblical material to suggest a connection between play and Creation, though Proverbs 8:30f can be taken to suggest this.[1] But apart

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[1] See Moltmann, op.cit., p.40; Kuhn, op.cit., p.388.

from the Biblical material, it is interesting to note that when Moltmann sketches out his theology of play he tends to concentrate on the playfulness in Creation and in the New Creation. This world and its history tends, as we saw, to disappear, dragged down by the bondage of the law and the futility of "works".

Our contention, however, is that there must be room left for the goals and purposes, for the striving and the labour, of human history and experience in this world. The play of Creation may open a space for the realm of teleology, and the play of the New Creation may be the telos of that teleology; but these beginning- and end-games are only real and serious because of "the labour of the negative". Aesthetics may provide the categories for the beginning and end of things; ethical striving may be grounded in, and ultimately taken up into, the joyful play of aesthetics; but if we are to avoid regression into an infantile "dreamful ease" we need what we might call "a teleological middle" to breach and hold apart beginning and end. To paraphrase Paul, the law is not a nasty cosmic accident, but is our pedagogue (Gal.3:24) until the in-breaking of the End-time in the person of Jesus Christ. The law is part of God's plan (Rom.7:7ff). No doubt we must become like children to enter the Kingdom of God, but must we not first become grown men and women and put away childish things (1 Cor.13:11)? No doubt death is the way of transcendence, but it may take us a lifetime to learn to die. The gospel, to sum up, does not simply abolish the law, but takes it up into itself (the law is "aufgehoben"). Christ is the end (telos) of the law (Rom. 10:4) in the sense that in him it is not simply annihilated, but consummated and fulfilled.

This "teleological middle" is also in evidence in a writer who in other ways seems very far away from Paul - Plotinus. Plotinus is a complex and profound thinker, and to devote only a few lines to him is perhaps rather foolhardy. However we must take this risk, and suggest that for Plotinus the whole, purposive, teleological realm of nous is surpassed, but not annihilated, by the superessential One. The One or the Good can be described as "the primary Beauty".[2] However this Beauty is no longer Beauty seen in terms of an ontology of measure (it is "greater than all measure"[3]), but rather, to use Fruchon's distinction[4], in terms of an ontology of light.[5] Plotinus seems to contain both sides of Platonism distinguished by Fruchon, that is, Beauty as measure and form, and Beauty as ineffable light, and the former aspect of Beauty seems to be as it were in the service of the latter. The One, the Good, the "primary Beauty", may draw us ultimately beyond the realm of nous, of order and purpose and form. But that realm of order and purpose and form is not merely superseded; it has its role to play in allowing that light to shine and thus in mediating that light to us. In the moment of ultimate transcendence it is fulfilled and consummated, not merely annihilated.[6] The most frequent images for the relation of

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[2] Enneads I.6.9. As we can see from this passage, however, the precise "relation" between Beauty and the Good is not clear. As A.H. Armstrong comments in his translation, Plotinus is here stretching language to its very limits.

[3] ibid.

[4] See Part One, Chapter 9(c) above.

[5] For Plotinus' use of the metaphor of light see Enneads I.6.9 and V.3.17.

[6] It has been argued (e.g. by B.A.G. Fuller in The Problem of Evil in Plotinus (Cambridge University Press, 1912)) that there is in Plotinus an irreconcilable conflict between a tendency to acosmic mysticism on the one hand, and a tendency to affirm the importance of the teleologically ordered cosmos on the other. But it is just as possible to argue that, despite the many difficulties, these tendencies can and should be held together in tension.

the One and nous are the emanation of light from the sun and the overflowing of water from a well or fountain. For our purpose the image of the fountain is particularly apt since it includes the idea of the water which has gone forth returning to its source.

In Plotinus we are of course in a very different world from that of Paul. Most importantly, the "outward journey" of Creation and Fall and the "return journey" of Redemption through Christ Jesus are in some sense historical, whereas emanation and homecoming in Plotinus are not seen as movements in time (although this difference can be overestimated since Creation and the New Creation are hardly events in time). The One of Plotinus is very different from the "personal" God of Old and New Testaments (although the "personality" of God can, in the present writer's view, be overemphasized). And as Augustine discovered, despite the affinities between the Christian religion and Neo-Platonism, the latter is always prone to harbour the secret worm of pride, that most devastating of all sins.[7] However despite these and other differences, Paul and Plotinus seem to share the conviction that while the penultimate (Law or nous) can, if taken as ultimate, hinder our approach to the true ultimate,[8] it is nevertheless "teleologically related" to the ultimate. The breach of the primal Unity is finally for the best; whether or not Fall is identified with Creation, it is a blessed fault (felix culpa) which by opening up the realm of human freedom and striving leads in the end to the enrichment of the divine life.

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[7] This recalls the question raised in Part Two, Chapter 4, above: How can the death of self ever be an achievement?

[8] Paul and Plotinus seem to share an acute awareness of the dangers of idolatry, i.e. self-absement before the divinity (or beauty) of a creature rather than of the Creator.

These affinities between Paul and Plotinus, and between the Christian and the Platonic traditions, receive their most ambitious expression in the philosophy of Hegel. The Platonic metaphor of emanation is fused with the Christian doctrines of Creation, Incarnation and Redemption. The overflowing of the One into the many and the ascent back to the One becomes imbued with the Judeo-Christian emphasis on the community and on history.[9] This is of course a dangerous oversimplification of a thinker who after all claimed to take up all previous thought into his own system. But it is Hegel who gives the most powerful expression of the idea that the divine life is enriched by being mediated through the history of human consciousness and freedom. The play of the trinitarian life of the Godhead before Creation is enriched and mediated by the Spirit going to work in this world and its history (the famous Hegelian "seriousness, suffering, patience and labour of the negative"). And in the End, for which the whole Hegelian cosmos is "groaning in travail", there is a con-summation and as it were a re-play of all the pain and striving that has gone before, only now in the security of Absolute Knowledge.

This theme of the "creative breach" in the absolute simplicity of Being appears also in Heidegger.[10] Heidegger both comes close to and also sharply diverges from Hegel. To discuss the relation between them

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9 This is not to suggest that the Christian and Platonic traditions come together for the first time in Hegel; but only that Hegel seeks to work out to its logical conclusion (and it is here perhaps that he transgresses) the Christian-Platonic tradition whose riches he was heir to.

10 e.g. Heidegger's discussion of the line: Schmerz versteinerte die Schwelle (Pain has turned the threshold to stone) from Trakl's poem "Ein Winterabend", Poetry, Language, Thought, pp.203ff. The theme also appears in a distorted and nihilistic form in Sartre.

is far beyond our present scope. But we may perhaps risk the following brief remarks. In both there is an emphasis on the need for difference to mediate identity.[11] But Heidegger's basic criticism of Hegel is, if we may venture to put it in our own words, that he remains in the sphere of logic and of essence, and has forgotten the groundless ground of this sphere, Being. To make an enormous historical leap that is fraught with dangers, but also seems to be suggestive, Hegel appears to remain in the realm of Plotinus' nous, and sets up an identity-in-difference relation between nous and soul which is at work in the material world. He does not make the final leap into the superessential One. On the other hand, Heidegger's "leap" into the groundless supra-logical "identity", which for him is a way of speaking of the event /Ereignis/ of Being,[12] seems to have something in common with Plotinus' moment of ultimate transcendence.[13] Whereas in the case of Hegel it is the status of the One which is questionable (it seems to lose its transcendence of nous and become the highest Idea),[14] in the case of Heidegger it is the status of the realm of essence,

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[11] For Heidegger's thoughts on this subject, and also his thoughts on Hegel's thoughts on the subject, see his Identity and Difference.

[12] See Identity and Difference, p.39 (p.104 for German); also Mehta, op.cit., pp.212ff.

[13] Such a comparison must be hedged about with reservations. Some support, however, may be gleaned from Mehta (op.cit., p.213) who in discussing the passage from Identity and Difference mentioned in the previous footnote cannot resist using the Platonic phrase "beyond Being". Heidegger's affinities with the mystical tradition and particularly with Eckhart (for which see Caputo, op.cit.,) could be seen as linking him in some respects with Plotinus (who according to Joan Stambaugh in the introduction to Identity and Difference, pp.8f, stands "on the borderline of Western thought") and perhaps ultimately with "the other side" of Platonism to which Gadamer refers.

[14] It is interesting to note how Hegel tries to tone down the "ecstatic" aspect of Plotinus lest the latter be thought a "fanatic" like "crazy Indians, Brahmins, monks and nuns". For Hegel on Plotinus see The History of Philosophy, trans. E.S. Haldane, II (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1894), 404-431.

of logic, of nous, that is questionable. If ontology is misconceived in terms of logic in Hegelian thought, in Heidegger the problem is what the experience of Being means in terms of logic. It is interesting to note how the tension between Hegel's logic and Heidegger's ontology seems to reappear in the tension between Hegel's eschatology of consummation and Heidegger's eschatology of transcendence; and to reappear yet again in the tension between Hegel's teleology and Heidegger's "play". For teleology seems to triumph over play in Hegel. The "philosophia Germanica perennis" of Eckhart, Angelus Silesius and Boehme may reappear in Hegel,[15] but, like the ecstatic dimension of Plotinus, it is curiously transmuted into terms of logic. In Hegel the themes of mystical thought are rationalized.[16] The true heir of the perennial philosophy of the German mystics is perhaps rather Heidegger,[17] for whom the groundless play of Being is prior to, and also perhaps at the end of, the whole realm of reason and logic with its ends and means,[18] and is only problematically related to the latter.

We have indulged in this long digression because it is out of the Christian-Platonic tradition in general, and out of Hegel and Heidegger in particular, that Gadamer's philosophy grows. It is out of that tradition that Gadamer's philosophy must be understood, criticized and if necessary amended. Hegel and Heidegger seem to represent

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15 See Findlay, Hegel: A Re-examination, pp.48f.

16 See Copleston's essay "Hegel and the Rationalization of Mysticism" in New Studies in Hegel's Philosophy, ed. Warren E. Steinkraus (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 187-200.

17 See Caputo, op.cit., pp.483f and passim.

18 For Heidegger this realm is also an historical epoch, stretching from Plato to the present reign of technology (and nihilism).

the working out of different aspects of that tradition (though in Heidegger's case we should perhaps talk of an undercurrent in that tradition). Hegel represents the culmination of the teleological view of reality that finds expression, for example, in the Logos philosophy of the ancient world. He also tries to include elements that belong to the mystical undercurrent,[19] but these, we suggested, loose their real meaning by being absorbed into the all-embracing realm of reason and logic. This mystical undercurrent seems to re-emerge in Heidegger, for whom the idea of play becomes central, but who seems to have a dangerously negative attitude to the world of reason, logic, science and technology. It is this negative attitude in Heidegger that Gadamer tries to mitigate by attempting to show how Heidegger's ontology can form the basis of the human sciences. In this attempt he draws close to Hegel by introducing his own version of dialectic (a "hermeneutical dialectic"). The question we have persistently raised is how even a modified dialectic can ever be detached from the teleological context it has in Platonic and Hegelian thought. If dialectic is not "teleologically related" to the whole, to the unified world of Ideas, in what sense is it dialectic at all, and not merely a surrender to the flux? "Surrender to the flux" is of course an option (Nietzsche took it), but it entails the abandonment of that "optimism" which is guaranteed by a "teleological relation" to the Christian-Platonic "true world" (which Nietzsche, with terrible logic, rejected). The notion of play cannot, in the absence of this "teleological relation", guarantee such "optimism",

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[19] See WM 461; TM 443.

such faith in dialectic, because it derives from the mystical tradition (or counter-tradition) and is used in connection with the groundless ground which may be the origin and destiny of reason, but is beyond any involvement in its dialectical workings. Gratuitousness within the world is, we suggested, very different from the gratuitousness of the world. Play seems an inadequate category with which to describe the pain, the striving and the "labour of the negative" which characterizes the history of this world - a pain which can only be supported in the hope of fulfilment beyond but via history (i.e. by the painful road of history, the via dolorosa, the via crucis).

What we appear to learn from our discussion of Hegel and Heidegger, and Gadamer's attempt to reconcile them, is that neither teleology nor play can manage on its own or do the job of the other. Both seem to be needed for a satisfactory theology and philosophy. How exactly they are related is a matter profound and obscure, perhaps a mystery. It is a matter which lies at the heart of Christian speculation on the mystical play of the Godhead, the suffering, death and resurrection of the Incarnate Word Christ Jesus, and the working of the Holy Spirit in our world and our history as they groan in travail with the Christian hope.

CHAPTER SIX

TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

(a) Philosophy and Religious Experience

In our concluding chapter we will try to give a brief summary of the conclusions which our study of Gadamer's philosophy has arrived at. We will also try to relate these conclusions to some more general questions concerning the nature of philosophy and theology. The suggestions we will make will be of necessity rather sketchy; however it is hoped that this will be balanced by the more detailed textual analysis which was prominent in the earlier chapters of this study, especially in Part One.

It was argued above that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is ultimately grounded in religious experience in the sense that his "optimism" about the historical process is dependent on the Christian-Platonic tradition. We saw that Gadamer to a certain extent admits this; however he limits his indebtedness to the mystical strand of that tradition, and stresses the origin of this strand in the "other side" of the Platonic doctrine of Beauty. We argued however that in order to justify his "optimism", his confidence that there is truth in the historical process, not only must the "other side" of Platonism be replaced in its context within the whole of Platonism (with its stress on order and teleology); Platonism itself must also, we argued, be replaced in its context of Christian Platonism where there is not only teleology in the cosmos but also in history. We doubted whether Gadamer's confidence that there is truth in the

historical process could be justified solely on the ground of an a priori, ontological identity-in-difference of word and thing. Only a view of truth as a Whole in terms of which the appropriateness of particular statements about reality can be known in their factual truth and falsity could justify Gadamer's confidence, we suggested. This Whole is the Whole of World-history. Thus we came close to Hegel, though without making the assumption, as Hegel may be said to have done, that this Whole is present in his own thought. We agreed with Pannenberg that justice could be done both to the demand for such a Whole, and to human finitude, by the provisional anticipation of (or hope for) such a Whole at the end of history.

Can we then see Gadamer as offering a contribution to the development of a contemporary Christian Platonism? Such a Christian Platonism would be heavily influenced by Hegel, who himself can be seen as one of the greatest thinkers in that tradition. The present writer believes that Gadamer can make such a contribution, provided that his position is supplemented in the ways suggested above. Gadamer himself of course would most probably reject any such supplementation; his allegiance to Heidegger would seem ultimately to outweight his attraction to Hegel. But in that case we must ask how he can justify the "optimism" which he owes to Hegel rather than to Heidegger. The present writer may have certain reservations about Fruchon's interpretation of Heidegger, but he agrees with the former's contention that the real source of Gadamer's philosophy is the Christian-Platonic tradition which goes back above all to John's Gospel and perhaps also to the kenotic passage in Philippians, and

which received such a powerful restatement in the thought of Hegel.[1] To what extent Gadamer's philosophy would survive such a heightening of the Hegelian aspects and a "toning-down" of certain of the Heideggerian themes (particularly the "ontologically positive" understanding of finitude) must remain an open question. But at the very least the remains of his philosophy would offer a contemporary Christian Platonism much food for thought.

But what would be the relation of such a Christian Platonism to Christian theology? It is probably safe to generalize that for the Christian Platonist it is difficult to hold apart philosophy and theology.[2] This is because in his view an important part of the total human experience of which the philosopher is trying to give an account is precisely religious experience. Religious experience or faith is not for him something additional or extra which is beyond the scope of philosophy, as it is for both scientific positivists and "positivists of revelation". Just as for the "idealist" (in the broad sense of the term)[3] the fact that the universe has produced a being capable of understanding the universe tells us something important about the nature of the universe, so for our philosopher the

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[1] See Fruchon, op.cit., p.558

[2] See, for example, Dean Inge's essay "Philosophy and Religion" in Contemporary British Philosophy, (First Series), ed. J.H. Muirhead (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1924), pp. 189-211. But whereas Inge says he is unable to distinguish between philosophy and religion we are suggesting the difficulty of distinguishing between philosophy and theology.

[3] This "broad" sense of idealism could also perhaps be referred to as metaphysical or "objective" idealism, in contrast to epistemological or "subjective" idealism. cf. H.B. Acton's article "Idealism" in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy. See also W. Temple's Nature, Man and God (London: Macmillan, 1935), p.490.

phenomenon of religious experience must be allowed to play its full part in his account of reality. Our Christian-Platonist philosopher will of course take religious experience as the key phenomenon in his attempt to understand the nature of reality.[4] But this key position is not due to some supernatural validation or special revelation; it can be justified only because, for him, it allows us to account for our total experience better than any other way. Such a Christian-Platonist account of reality would of course remain provisional, not least because the verification of its teleological understanding of the world would have to wait until the end of history. While being sufficiently convincing (or as Ian Ramsay would say, disclosive) as to demand commitment, its provisonality would hold it open to new experiences and to other accounts of reality. In particular it would be open to the contribution of non-Western religious traditions. As A.H. Armstrong has suggested, Christian Platonism seems uniquely fitted for such a role.[5] He first quotes a sentence from R.C. Zaehner's At Sundry Times: "Since Christianity claims to be a universal faith, it can only survive by showing that it can assimilate not only what is digestible to the Christian constitution in Plato and Aristotle, but also whatever in Oriental religion seems to point the way to Christ". Armstrong then comments:

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[4] For a similar conception of Christian philosophy, see Leonard Hodgson's The Doctrine of the Trinity (London: Nisbet, 1943), pp.21ff.

[5] See his essay "Platonism" in Prospect for Metaphysics, ed. Ian Ramsay (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961), p.97.

> To me it seems that an open-minded and unsystematic Christian Platonism offers the best help at present available in our Western tradition for doing this, and also for dealing with those currents of thought in the West, vague and hard to describe but sometimes very powerful, which have some affinities with Oriental religion and cannot, as far as I can see, be effectively understood or controlled by either Thomism or contemporary English philosophy.[6]

In the present writer's view, Gadamer has much to offer such an "open-minded and unsystematic" Christian Platonism.

As was implied in the previous paragraph, a negative attitude to the relation of philosophy (including Christian Platonism) and theology often presupposes a particular view of revelation in which naturally available truths of reason are opposed to supernaturally revealed truth. In extreme cases (Pascal, Kierkegaard, early Barth) truths of reason are dismissed as irrelevant to faith and the idea of a "Christian philosophy" is anathema. This is not the place to dispute the concept of revelation. The present writer can only declare that he cannot, and sees no need to, accept such a narrow view of revelation. There is another view of revelation, perhaps given its most powerful expression by Hegel, where revelation is not the miraculous imparting of information about supernatural reality inaccessible to, and perhaps incompatible with, human reason, but is rather the manifestation in the form of religion of the true nature of reality and of reason (for the real, on this view, is rational).[7] It seems quite legitimate to the present writer to talk

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[6] ibid.

[7] See the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, trans. Speirs and Sanderson, II, 328-346 (HW XII 192-207). See also Peter C. Hodgson's translation based on the Lasson edition of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Part III, published by the American Academy of Religion under the title The Christian Religion (Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1979), pp.1-26.

of the Idea of Beauty being "revealed" in our experience of the beautiful, and of the nature of God and his relation to the world being "revealed" in the primitive Christian community's (and our) experience of Jesus, without being in the least committed to that view of revelation which in its zeal for the freedom and transcendence of God risks turning him into a capricious despot, and in its zeal for denouncing the sinfulness of humanity risks denying the very essence of that humanity. This is not to deny that for Christian Platonism Christian experience will be the primary "revelation" of the nature of reality, though other experiences would also be accepted as "revelatory". Our criticism of Gadamer was not that he gave an important place to aesthetic experience as a manifestation of the nature of reality; it was that he gave primacy to aesthetic experience.

If we soften the sharp distinction between supernaturally revealed truth and the natural truths of reason, then the sharp distinction between theology and philosophy tends to dissolve. It then becomes difficult to distinguish Christian theology from Christian philosophy; both are disciplines which take Christian experience as the keystone of their account of reality. Of course in such a situation there would still be a place for the other disciplines which normally make up a Faculty of Divinity, e.g. Biblical Studies, History of Christian Doctrine, Christian Ethics, etc. All we are arguing is that in such a situation Systematic or Philosophical theology would be hardly distinguishable from Christian Philosophy. Again, Christian Philosophy would take its place in the University alongside the other kinds of philosophy which would normally be studied in the Faculty of Philosophy. This digression, if digression

it be, is merely an attempt to express the present author's conviction that the Christian world-view,[8] perhaps best described as Christian Platonism, must take its place in the intellectual market-place of our time rather than withdraw into the illusory security of what Bonhoeffer called "the positivism of revelation" with its narrowly "Biblical" theology.[9]

However, as we remarked above, it is in our view philosophy and theology that may become indistinguishable for the Christian Platonist, and not philosophy and religion. The present writer is opposed both to any identification of philosophy and religion as well as to any Hegelian "Aufhebung" of religion by philosophy. Although "religion" is by no means precisely the same as "religious experience", we will attempt to address this question of the relation of philosophy and religion by venturing some remarks on the relation of philosophy and religious experience.

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[8] This is not to reduce Christian faith to a "mere world-view", i.e. to a theory about the nature of reality. But it is to suggest that such a Christian world-view (which is distinct from, and grounded in, Christian experience) is an inescapable task of Christian faith. In the present writer's view to cling to some pure Christian experience uncontaminated by philosophy is a dangerous illusion, despite what Kierkegaard, Heidegger (W Met 20) and their followers have to say.

[9] See Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison, (Enlarged Edition) ed. E. Bethge (London; SCM, 1971), pp.280, 286, 328f.
On the "positivity" of the Christian religion, see Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, trans. Speirs and Sanderson, pp. 335-346. cf. The Christian Religion, trans. Hodgson, pp.16-26.

First of all, it must be said that, as Gadamer holds, philosophy itself is an "experience of thought". The idea that philosophical thought is a sort of experience is common to both Hegel and Heidegger (though there are great differences in what they mean by this). At least one of the things that Hegel meant was that philosophy is not the mere application of an abstract logical pattern to all reality. Thus in the Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit he criticizes the "monotony and abstract universality" of Schelling's "monochromatic formalism".[10] Philosophy for Hegel is not the subsequent application to anything and everything of a formula intuited in some quasi-religious experience of the Absolute; it is rather the surrender to the "immanent rhythm" of the "things themselves". Of course Hegel has often been accused of the very thing which he criticizes in Schelling, that is, forcing one formula (in Hegel's case, the "dialectic" of thesis-antithesis-synthesis) on all reality. This caricature of Hegel's method has been repudiated by most students of Hegel. Be that as it may, what is important for our present purposes is the idea (only partly, let it be clearly said, derived from Hegel) that on the basis of religious experience (and particularly the Christian experience of faith) we may surrender ourselves to the phenomena themselves, trusting that what emerges will not contradict our experience that reality is self-giving, and hoping that our religious experience of Divine Providence will in the end be confirmed by the facts. This of course is close to what Gadamer seems to be doing implicitly, with the important differences that (1) for Christian experience Gadamer substitutes the "other side" of the Platonic

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[10] See PS 8f (HW II 12ff)

experience of Beauty; and (2) there can be for him no final confirmation of his "optimism".

Yet despite the consideration that philosophy is in some sense a mode of experience, the fact that it is ultimately directed towards knowledge distinguishes it from experience. Gadamer of course rejects any "teleological relation" of experience to knowledge. But there are many difficulties in such a position, as we tried to show in our chapters on Gadamer's concept of experience.[11] Hegel, on the other hand, wanted to elevate all experience (including religious experience) into philosophical knowledge. If we focus on the relation of religious experience to philosophical knowledge, then the present writer must go along with Hegel to the extent that he (the present writer) believes (in contrast, for example, to Kierkegaard) that the philosophical or theological task is ineluctable. In the present writer's view it is highly dangerous from many points of view consciously to refuse to attempt to comprehend our religious experience in thought - an activity traditionally described as fides quaerens intellectum. This is not to say that all Christians must be philosophers or theologians (though in an important sense that is so, as Luther remarked); it is only to say that for a Christian to repudiate theology is a theological activity, and a highly dangerous one at that. Nevertheless the present writer would part company with Hegel insofar as in our view the truth of religious experience ultimately transcends rational thought; it is not to be equated with reason itself (as in Hegel), but is rather the origin and destiny of reason. We might say that reason mediates experience,

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[11] See Part One, Chapters 3 and 4 above.

just as we might say that for Hegel experience mediates reason. This would not be to end up in Gadamer's position, since for him experience never attains to the level of knowledge, whereas for us religious experience ultimately goes beyond, but by no means invalidates, rational knowledge. The origin and destiny of the World may be beyond reason (and hence "playful"), but it is the meaningful or in the broad sense "rational" pattern of the World and its history which most fully displays that supra-rational source, just as in Plotinus it is nous that displays the One, and in the metaphysics of light it is order and form that allow light to play. This seems to connect with the "aesthetic" theme in theodicy (which John Hick has pointed to)[12] in that it is only the pattern and meaning in World-history which allows it fully to reflect the Divine glory.

But is it really possible to distinguish "supra-rational" from "irrational", it might be asked. And what sense does it make to talk of an experience beyond reason, beyond language? Are not reason and language the conditions of the possibility of experience? In response to the first question we can only suggest that our stress on reason as that which most fully mediates its supra-rational source, a source which in itself can only be experienced, not comprehended, may perhaps go some way towards reassuring the reader that we are not advocating a surrender to irrationalism. In answer to all these questions it can be said that in a sense it is most rational to locate (if we may use a spatial metaphor)

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[12] See Evil and the God of Love (London: Fontana/Collins, 1968), pp.88ff.

the source or principle of reason beyond reason, as Plotinus did, thus remaining true to Plato's description of the Good in the Republic.[13] And as Heidegger has pointed out, language itself cannot be spoken about - though we can have "an experience with language".[14] Such experience which goes beyond reason and language can be described as "ecstatic". However such ecstasy can (again to use a spatial metaphor) be either an "upward" or a "downward" ecstasy.[15] We may experience the breakdown of reason and language either, so to speak, by coming out the top or falling out the bottom. The former will be the briefest moment of ecstasy as we glimpse the source of reason and language and meaning; the latter will be a "season in hell" as we glimpse the disintegration of reason and language and meaning into primal chaos, into Plato's flux of Becoming, the apeiron or unlimited, which reappears in Plotinus' Non-being. How we might "relate" (if it is possible to use such a term here) what is experienced in these two different kinds of ecstasy is beyond the capacity of the present writer to say. However what is most important in his opinion is that we attempt to maintain a distinction between them so that the experience of a Nietzsche and of a Sartre and perhaps of a Heidegger does not somehow acquire the characteristics

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[13] See J.N. Findlay's Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines, pp.369f, 409.

[14] See "The Nature of Language" in On the Way to Language, pp.57-108, esp. pp.57ff ("Das Wesen der Sprache", Unterwegs zur Sprache, pp. 157-216, esp. pp.159ff).

[15] Gilson talks of a "downward extasis" in Being and Some Philosophers, p.208; pp.208f are helpful on the distinction we are trying to make here.

of the experience testified to by the Christian-Platonic mystical tradition. The Divine play which begins and ends beyond reason must be carefully distinguished from the concept of "play" which is so often used to undermine and disrupt the belief that there is rational meaning in the cosmos and in history. Gadamer may be accused of failing to observe this distinction, and of transferring to the second concept of play an "optimism" which belongs only to the first, and which has, as we argued, been bought with a price, the price of the via crucis, "the labour of the negative".

Rather than being itself a kind of irrationalism, the natural tendency of the Christian-Platonic position we have been sketching out is to identify irrationalism with evil. Evil is seen as that which is recalcitrant to reason, which resists any elevation into the realm of reason, order and meaning.[16] Hence the Christian Platonist would be implacably opposed to any kind of Nietzschean irrationalism. While reason separated from its supra-rational grounding can become daemonic, with the terrifying consequences we in the twentieth century must face, nevertheless the answer is not to attack reason itself. To try to ground reason in some pre- or sub-rational dimension, or even to abandon reason altogether, as Nietzsche and his followers (including perhaps Heidegger) appear to do, is from our perspective to play a dangerous game. For as Mephistopheles says in Goethe's Faust,[17] to seek to disrupt and

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16 There are of course problems in saying that any such "non-being" actively "resists" order, as Hick points out with regard to Plotinus (see op.cit., p.46ff). Human thought and language are as little able to cope with the sub-rational as they are with the supra-rational.

17 Lines 1349ff.

destroy the world-order is to seek to disrupt and destroy that alone which allows light to shine, and so ultimately to seek to destroy light itself. This does not mean that the Christian Platonist is committed to the "world-order" in the sense of the "status quo" (though regrettably that has often enough been the case). On the contrary, it is to say that the Divine Light cannot fully display itself as long as the "world-order" is imperfect, as long as injustice, oppression and inequality mar the order and rationality of the world. The Divine Light cannot fully dis-play itself until such inequalities and disorders have been worked out in the power of the Spirit.

Nevertheless, without becoming involved in a discussion of sin and the problem of evil, we might suggest that there is a role for creative disorder in the world-process in that it makes possible life, growth and, above all, freedom. Growing pains are doubtless necessary, and even sin can have an ultimately creative result, as the tradition of "felix culpa" from Augustine to Hegel testifies.[18] But that "ultimately" must be taken with full seriousness. The power of the negative can only be known to be creative from the standpoint of the end of history when the Whole is known (though we may no doubt anticipate or hope for the Whole). This means that now we must take all forms of negativity with utter seriousness and must struggle against them, while nevertheless trusting that ultimately they are part of the pattern and meaning of history. This is not to deny that such a trust can be agonizingly difficult in face of the apparent meaninglessness of suffering and of human

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18 On the phrase "felix culpa" see Hick, op.cit., p.182f and p.280, note 1.

perversity. However we would disagree with the view that sin (both in the understanding subject and in what is to be understood) invalidates all attempts to understand the world rationally or "speculatively", as Kierkegaard puts it.[19] In our view it is rather that the world can only be understood rationally or "speculatively" from the standpoint of the end of history. Then the world will, we believe, fully reflect the Divine glory. The real charge that must be made against Hegel is not that he thought that sin and suffering can ultimately be known to be part of the pattern and meaning of history. Hegel quite correctly (in our view) saw that such a pattern could only be known at the end of history. The charge against Hegel is rather that he seems to have thought that in some sense history came to an end in his thought, and that therefore he could know the pattern and meaning of history.

It is Gadamer's position which in our view is much more dangerous than Hegel's. Hegel's error is comparatively straightforward in its sublime hubris, and for that reason more easy to correct. Gadamer's undertaking is much more ambiguous. He wants to understand history as being in some sense "rational"[20] (which for him is the same as "linguistic" - whatever that may mean)[21] and "speculative", but without the standpoint of the end of history (and hence of the Whole) being

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19 See The Sickness Unto Death, pp.150ff.

20 cf. the passage by de Waelhens quoted in Part Two, Chapter 4(a) above.

21 See WM 379; TM 363.

a possibility even in principle. He seeks to introduce a secularized version of the Divine play of the "end-game" into the workings of the historical process, but he does little to show that this is not in reality a surrender to aimless flux and thus to a kind of irrationalism. And since he does not seem ready to acknowledge the price of his confidence in the historical process (that price being in religious terms the Cross and in philosophical terms "the labour of the negative"), it is Gadamer rather than Hegel who could be accused of not yet having considered the great weight of sin and suffering in the world.

(b) Philosophy and Religious Language

The final pages of this study will be devoted to the contribution of Gadamer to the problem of language in theology (or, as we have suggested, a Christian-Platonic philosophy). As we saw above, Gadamer stresses the priority of what we termed "ontologically evocative language" in contrast to "the language of the statement". This contrast corresponds to a contrast within modern theology between two very different styles of theology. To Gadamer's "ontologically evocative language" corresponds that kind of theology which, to use John Macquarrie's phrase, uses "the language of existence and Being". Much of this style of theology is heavily influenced by Heidegger, for whom as we saw language is essentially poetic. In this context one thinks above all of the so-called "New Hermeneutic" theologians (Ebeling, Fuchs and perhaps Ott)[1] and of Macquarrie himself.[2] However we should like to include under this heading all theologies which lay stress on the function of symbols (e.g. Tillich). Such a stress on symbols ultimately goes back, we would suggest, to that Christian-Platonic mystical tradition deriving (at least in part) from the "other side" of Platonism which Gadamer has pointed to (one thinks in this context particularly of Pseudo-Dionysius). That the same theology often makes considerable use both of the concept of symbol and of the "language of existence and

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1 See Ernst Fuchs' Hermeneutik (Bad Cannstatt: R. Müllerschön, 1954); also New Frontiers in Theology, I (The Later Heidegger and Theology) and II (The New Hermeneutic), ed. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb (New York; Harper and Row, 1963-4).

2 See especially his God-talk (London: SCM, 1967), especially chapter 12.

Being" (e.g. Tillich and Macquarrie) perhaps sheds light on Gadamer's rather cryptic remark that "in this tradition of Platonism /i.e. Christian-Platonic mysticism/ was formed the conceptual vocabulary needed for thought about the finitude of human existence". (WM 461; TM 443)

In contrast to this style of theology stands Pannenberg's insistence on the "objectivity" or "factuality" of language, and his demand that statements about historical events should be capable in principle of being known to be true or false. Pannenberg seems to want to tether all theological language to statements about historical events - specifically the historical "events" of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Certainly he tries to leave room for what he calls "doxological statements" which intend primarily to speak of God's eternal essence, as opposed to "kerygmatic statements" which speak of definite earthily events that come from God.[3] But for Pannenberg "doxological statements are statements about God on the basis of events that have been experienced as having occurred from him. They speak of the way in which God has shown himself in specific occurrences".[4] Of course no theology that is authentically Christian will want to lose its connection with "the historical Jesus" (even if the connection remains only in the form of the "that", as in Bultmann). But few, especially in the other style of theology

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[3] See Jesus - God and Man (London: SCM, 1968), pp.184ff. cf. the essays "What is a dogmatic statement?", secs, 5 and 6, and "Analogy and Doxology" in Basic Questions in Theology, I.

[4] Jesus - God and Man, pp.184f.

we have mentioned, will want to base all theology on "objective" verifiable statements about historical "events" in the manner of Pannenberg.

Gadamer is of relevance to this theological debate because, starting from the side which holds "ontologically evocative language" to be fundamental, he wants to do justice, as far as is possible, to the "factuality" /Sachlichkeit/ of language. As we saw, language is not for him merely the expression of personal, existential meaning. Gadamer seems to go as far as it is possible to go towards satisfying the demand for "objectivity" while remaining entirely within the sphere of "ontologically evocative language". The "objectifying statement" has doubtful status, if it has any at all, for Gadamer. Moreover the lack of an eschatology in Gadamer means that such steps as he does take in the direction of the "objective statement" can have no criterion of the latter's truth or falsehood since there is no Whole in terms of which it could be known, even if only in principle, to be true or false. The Whole that Gadamer does invoke seems to be not so much an unexpressed Hegelian totality as an inexpressible Heideggerian totality; it is not so much "the unsaid" as "the unsayable". Thus Gadamer can help us to plot the limits of the range of the "non-objectifying language" about which certain proponents of the first style of theology mentioned above have had so much to say.[5]

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[5] For Heidegger's reaction to this see his contribution to the theological conference on the theme of "The Problem of a Non-Objectifying Thinking and Speaking in Today's Theology" which took place at Drew University, New Jersey, in 1964; see The Piety of Thinking, ed. Hart and Maraldo, pp.22-31.

But as we suggested above, it is doubtful whether Pannenberg with his stress on "objectifying statements" can do justice to that dimension of theology which the proponents of a symbolic, "non-objectifying" theology rightly (in the present writer's view) point to. Are we left then with an either/or between Gadamer and Pannenberg? Since neither (in the present writer's view) can do justice to the whole truth, must we simply opt for what seems to us the lesser of two evils? Perhaps. But might it not be possible to combine the insights of both? Perhaps the Whole of the history of the world could be both poetically and symbolically evoked and provisionally anticipated in statements, in the sense that particular events of our history can not only be symbols which lead us to, and perhaps beyond, the Whole, but also have their place as part of the over-all pattern and meaning of the Whole. This suggestion is obviously connected with what was said at the end of our chapter on "the speculative structure of language" about combining the insights of Heidegger and Hegel.[6] However this is not the place to elaborate the all-too-brief and sketchy discussion given there. At this point all we can do is repeat our suggestion that, to the best of the present writer's understanding, the insights of Heidegger and Hegel (and the modern theologies which correspond to these insights) are not in principle incompatible, though there would no doubt have to be much accommodation on both sides. Or to put the matter in Hegelian terms, this opposition is not "unaufhebbar". To put the matter thus betrays a preference for Hegel only to the extent that, in the present writer's

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[6] See Part One, Chapter 8(c) above.

view, for a Christian philosophy Hegel's "both/and" must in the end (a phrase to be taken with the utmost seriousness) triumph over any "either/or".

Thus as far as "God's dealings with the world" are concerned, we would suggest that, while there is an independent and valuable place for faith in its own right,[7] nevertheless faith is in the end (a phrase again to be taken seriously) "teleologically related" to knowledge. The present writer is not interested in "faith for faith's sake", as sometimes seems to be the case in the first style of theology mentioned above (especially Ebeling). Such knowledge is for us, in contrast to what Hegel seems to have thought, still future. In contrast to the Heideggerians on the other hand, we would hold that faith is in the not-yet-known Whole, not in some unknowable Whole. However it must be stressed that what is not yet known is not God in his essence, but God "in his dealings with the world", not the ontological or immanent Trinity (which is in the strict sense unknowable) but the economic Trinity. We may perhaps in the end apprehend beyond God's "relation" to the world the depths of the Godhead, beyond the economic the ontological Trinity. But the only way of talking about such a possibility is in symbolic language, in "ontologically evocative language". The Whole of the history of God with the world may be the best symbol we have for the Being of God, but it is still only a symbol. The realm of

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[7] This seems faintly to echo Aquinas' position that certain truths are available both to faith and to reason. We will also suggest below (though in a sense very different from Aquinas) that the profoundest truth is available to faith alone.

beings may be left behind in the movement towards Being itself; but the "relation" of Being to beings as the latter are gathered together into a harmonious Whole is the best hint we have as to the nature of Being itself.[8] To use Plotinian terms (though this is not to suggest that Plotinus actually said what we are about to say), the One or the Good is beyond nous, but nous is the best symbol or image we have, for the One or the Good. Or as Plato put it: "both knowledge and truth are to be regarded as like the Good, but to identify either with the Good is wrong. The Good must hold a yet higher place of honour."[9] (Republic 508, Cornford translation). Or as John says at the end of the Prologue to his gospel: "No one has ever seen God; but God's only Son, he who is nearest to the Father's heart, he has made him known" (John 1:18, NEB).

This verse from John's Gospel brings to mind that "speculative" structure which we have described elsewhere. Indeed the "speculative" structure, which we have also characterized (though Gadamer does not) as the "identity-in-difference" structure, pervades John's Gospel - though it is the author of Hebrews who comes closest to speaking of this "speculative" structure in so many words: "He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe

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8 In the Heideggerian and perhaps the Thomist sense of "Being", not the Platonic; but we could perhaps say the same thing in Platonic terms by talking of transcendence towards the One, the Good, the Primal Source, as we do below.

9 Whether we are thus by implication straying into some form of "subordinationism" is beyond the scope of this study. But certainly any Christian-Platonic philosophy would have to study carefully the development from the second century Apologists and their Logos Christology through Origen and Alexandrian theology to Arius. There is perhaps more in pre-Nicene theology to "retrieve" than orthodoxy generally allows.

by his word of power" (Hebrews 1:3, RSV). As Fruchon says, the "speculative" ontology which Gadamer claims to derive from Plato derives just as much, if not more, from John's Gospel and perhaps from the "kenotic" passage in Phillipians. These are the real fountainhead of Christian Platonism, a stream from which Gadamer has perhaps drunk more deeply than he admits. This tradition of Christian Platonism tends to be in the broad sense "mystical" and sacramental in character. By this we mean that the Primal Source of Being comes to meet us in a concrete being which is his image (the sacramental movement), and that through this concrete being or image we are led ultimately beyond all concrete beings and images back to the Primal Source (the mystical movement). This double movement is typical of Platonism, and can be seen with particular clarity in the Platonic doctrine of Beauty (the "Sacramental" movement is described in the Phaedrus passage we have discussed above, and the "mystical" movement in the Symposium). What turns this Platonism into Christian Platonism is the conviction that in the man Jesus God comes to meet us in a special way, that Jesus "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature", and that through Jesus we have access to the Father in a special way. But because Jesus is in a special way the "Mediator" of Divine transcendence, because Divine transcendence dwells in Jesus in a special way, we must not assume that God cannot be present to us in other beings. On the contrary, the New Testament itself pushes us in the direction of saying that God is present to us in other beings in the way that he is present to us in Jesus.

Thus God is present to us in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, and indeed every time we eat and drink together in Jesus' name. God is present to us in those whose need demands our attention, for inasmuch as we respond to them we respond to Jesus himself.[10] The natural consequence of this line of thought (and way of life) is the conviction that through Jesus, through the Spirit of Jesus, all things can, and in the end will, become a manifestation of the presence of God. Through the Spirit of Jesus all things will in the end, the Christian believes, display the glory of the Father. Thus we might say that in the end the very essence and structure of the world will be recognized as "speculative" in that it reflects or mirrors the Divine glory. It is in this sense that the Christian theologian may want to speak of "the sacramental universe".[11]

There has always been a debate as to whether the influence of Platonism has helped or hindered the presentation of this Christian vision of reality.[12] The most obvious danger which the influence of Platonism could lead to is that Jesus is seen ultimately as merely a stage in the ascent of the soul to the Father, a stage which the "Christian gnostic" ultimately goes beyond (a view ascribed to

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10 See Matthew 25:34-36. See also Simone Weil's essay "Forms of the Implicit Love of God" in Waiting for God, pp.94-166. Weil says that God is really though secretly present in religious ceremonies, in the beauty of the world, in our neighbour and also in friendship (p.95). In the essay she gives a fairly lengthy discussion of each of these.

11 As W. Temple entitles Lecture XIX of his Nature, Man and God.

12 For a recent discussion, see J.P. Mackey's Jesus: the Man and the Myth (London: SCM, 1979), pp.217ff.

Origen by H.R. MacKintosh).[13] It is this "subordinationist" tendency which is often blamed for leading directly to the errors of Arius. Whether this is so it is beyond our present scope and capacity to discuss, though it is perhaps worth remarking that in the present writer's view an idolatry of Jesus is just as dangerous from a Christian point of view as anything promulgated by those who stand condemned of "subordinationism".

Whatever the erros of pre-Nicene Christian Platonism, the tradition itself has continued down through the centuries.[14] It might be argued that this current of thought reached its high point (thus far) in the thought of Hegel, in the sense that, whatever objections must be made to his philosophy, it nevertheless exercised a decisive and inescapable influence on all subsequent thought. Thus, for example, however much they may try to distance themselves from Hegel, the philosophers and theologians influenced by the Idealist movement which flourished in Britain for thirty years either side of the turn of the twentieth century are permeated by the influence - direct and indirect - of Hegel. This rather neglected movement also saw a renaissance of the Christian-Platonic tradition (though as has often been suggested, there seems to be an inherent Platonism in the Anglican tradition - if not in "Anglo-Saxon" philosophy, as J.H. Muirhead thought!)[15] Whatever the short-comings of this Christian-

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13 See The Doctrine of the Person of Christ (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1912), pp.166f.

14 For an excellent summary of the Platonic tradition (and a defence of the view that Aquinas was essentially a Platonist) see the final chapter of J.N. Findlay's Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines.

15 See Muirhead's The Platonic Tradition in Anglo-Saxon Philosophy (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931).

Platonist revival in British thought, it is in the present writer's view a better point of departure (or "partner in dialogue") for contemporary Christian thought in the English-speaking world than the forms of "realism" and "empiricism" which eclipsed it.[16] If, as G.J. Warnock says, the citadel of British Idealism was never taken by storm, but was "quietly discovered one day to be no longer inhabited",[17] then perhaps it is time the squatters moved in.

This is not, however, to advocate any uncritical return to British Idealism. It is the general themes of this style of philosophizing and theologizing which the present writer finds relevant rather than the way these themes are presented. Sometimes, especially in the case of the theologians (e.g. Temple), the presentation arouses the impatience one is quick to condemn in the "positivists". There seem to the present writer to be many points of contact between the themes of this style of philosophy and theology and Gadamer's enterprise. Both seek to give an "optimistic" or in the broad sense of the term "idealistic" account of reality;[18] in both there is a stress on religious and aesthetic experience as key factors in that account; both are strongly "sacramental" or "Incarnational"; both could perhaps

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16 Though precisely the opposite view is attributed to Donald MacKinnon by Fergus Kerr in his review of the former's contribution to the series Explorations in Theology; see New Blackfriars, vol.60, No. 708, May 1979, pp.235-8. In fact all the books reviewed by Kerr in this issue of New Blackfriars relate in one way or another to this problem.

17 English Philosophy Since 1900, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1969), p.8.

18 Gadamer would seem to be on the "idealist" side of the divide which "runs like a fault across the whole range of modern thought" according to MacKinnon; see Kerr's review, p.236.

be accused of underestimating the price at which their optimism is bought, of failing to appreciate the full radicality of the Cross and "the labour of the negative". It is these affinities which suggest to the present writer the possibility of a restatement of some of the main themes of the British versions of Idealism and Christian Platonism in terms of Gadamer's philosophy - with the amendments to the latter that we have suggested. It might also be possible to give an authentic presentation of that optimism which is the birthright of all Christian Platonism[19] by grounding it in the Cross and "the labour of the negative" - a task to which a closer examination of both Hegel and Heidegger might be able to contribute.

In such a Christian Platonism, then, the symbolic or "speculative" function of language would have the first and last word. As William Temple says in his Christus Veritas: "Symbolism is thus the supreme philosophic principle".[20] By "symbolism" Temple does not mean the use of conventional symbols; he has in mind rather the symbolism of great art where, he says (quoting Emerson) "the word is one with that it tells of".[21] In a footnote on the following page he writes: ". . . a poem can itself be the very embodiment and vehicle of a value which is found in (not only on occasion of)

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19 Though not all Christian Platonism has been "optimistic". Dean Inge ("the gloomy dean"), for instance, attacked the prevailing "optimism" of his day. However this seems to have been both because that "optimism" was superficial and facile, and also because he was so much under the influence of Neo-Platonism.

20 Christus Veritas (London: Macmillan, 1924), p.19.

21 Christus Veritas, p.17.

the apprehension of the words".[22] While it would be unwise to place too much weight on the similarity between sentences such as this and Gadamer's position, there does nevertheless seem to be a genuine correspondence. Moreover Gadamer shares with the style of theology which Temple epitomizes a conviction that "poetic truth" is philosophically (and theologically) important. But while we agreed below that symbolic and poetic language may evoke the Whole, and may ultimately point us beyond the Whole into the depths of the Godhead, we nevertheless suggested that to abandon the language of statements altogether is a dangerous step to take. For symbolic language and poetic truth can all too easily lose touch with "the prose of the world" and hard (if not brute) facts. Christian Platonism is what Tillich calls in his Dynamics of Faith an "ontological type of faith" and thus has an inherent tendency to be "romantic-conservative", especially in politics.[23] One of the main reasons the present writer has for clinging to the language of the statement is the need for objective statements in order to criticize the factual state of the world. The perennial danger which threatens Christian Platonism is that it may lose touch with concrete circumstances. Suffering and degredation can easily become only a mode of participation in the sufferings of Christ (and thus a way of transcendence) and not also a negative state of affairs which we must talk about

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[22] Christus Veritas, p.18, note 1.

[23] See Paul Tillich, The Dynamics of Faith (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), pp.58-64. Although Tillich does not mention Christian Platonism by name, it is perhaps significant that under the heading of "Ontological types of religion" he deals with "sacramentalism" and "mysticism".

in unambiguous terms and must struggle to overcome. As Gadamer says at the end of Truth and Method, the language of the poem is essentially ambiguous and we must not try to understand it too literally. But if it is right that poetry and all art should be richly ambiguous, as should all symbolic language in religion (most importantly because it is at once icon and idol), there must also in the present writer's view be room for statements of fact which are as unambiguous as possible and which must be taken quite literally. Unless this is so, the sacramentalism and mysticism of the Platonic tradition can all too easily lose (and have all too frequently lost) contact with the contingent facts of history which are the distinctive concern of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

It is because of this tendency of the eschatology of transcendence in the Platonic tradition to lose touch with history that, in the present writer's view, Hegel's version of Christian Platonism must exert an influence that is in some sense definitive. In our discussion of "Providence and Play" above we associated the idea of play particularly with the mystical tradition and with the eschatology of transcendence, while the idea of "labour" (in all its senses) was associated with the eschatology of consummation. Thus we might also express the danger indicated in the previous paragraph by talking of the danger of misapplying the category of play, which properly belongs to the ontological realm of the eternal Being of God and his "relation" to the world, to the innerworldly realm which is properly the realm where the divine Spirit is at work. The danger here is that human degradation and suffering are not really taken

seriously when they are not seen as objective facts to be struggled with as well as opportunities to participate in the sufferings of Christ and so in the play of the Divine Life. Thus, in the present writer's view, the eschatology of consummation with its idea of the "labour" of the Spirit, which was given philosophical expression by Hegel and which through Marx influences the modern theologies of liberation, maintains an essential dimension of Christian Platonism. Without this dimension Christian Platonism is all too exposed to the criticisms levelled at it by Marxian thinkers that it is mere mystification, mere ideology masking hard (economic) facts. Conversely, the theologies of liberation need, in the present writer's view, an awareness of the dimension of transcendence in human experience lest they forget the ontological depths of the Divine Life, and, like the Marxists, turn the Whole towards which history is labouring, and which is the greatest symbol or icon of that Life, into an idol. For as Goethe says in the "Chorus Mysticus" at the end of Faust: "Alles Vergängliche/ist nur ein Gleichnis". In the end, everything in time is only an image.

A P P E N D I X

It is necessary to say something about the second section of Part Three of Truth and Method, entitled "The emergence of the concept of language in the history of Western thought /Prägung des Begriffs ‚Sprache' durch die Denkgeschichte des Abendlandes/". Our attempt to give the gist of Part Three of Truth and Method has omitted this historical section which traces the development of the concept of language from Plato to Nicholas of Cusa. This omission was made for the same reasons that we omitted the sections on the history of aesthetics and of hermeneutics. First of all, it is beyond the scope of this study, and the competence of its author, to give a critical account of these historical excursions. Secondly, it is in the present writer's view possible to give a reasonably adequate account of the core of Gadamer's philosophy without following him in these valuable and erudite historical surveys. As we said above, Gadamer has a tendency to revel in historical exegesis almost for its own sake, and while this no doubt makes fascinating reading, it has the result that his argument at times meanders rather than flows. To change the metaphor, Gadamer's central argument can survive a considerable pruning of its more luxuriant foliage.

We will, however, attempt to summarise the main points of the section in question. The first part of the section is called "Language and Logos" and is mainly a discussion of Plato's Cratylus. The upshot of Gadamer's discussion is that "the legitimate question whether the word is nothing but a 'pure sign' or has after all something of the 'image' about it is thoroughly discredited by the Cratylus". (WM 391;

TM 374) This result of the Cratylus - a result which Gadamer admits is not particularly emphasized - lies at the start of Western thought about language. Knowledge is located beyond language in the intelligible realm, and language is seen in terms of the sign rather than the image. (ibid.) Language as sign tends to become an instrument or tool which allows us to manipulate what we know already in a non-linguistic way, whereas language as image allows to come-to-presentation that which otherwise would remain unknown. Thus the triumph of sign over image which we see in the Cratylus is an epoch-making decision. (ibid.)

The second part of the section ("Language and Verbum") is a discussion of the effect of Christological and Trinitarian speculation on the concept of language. The Christian idea of Incarnation "prevented the forgetfulness of language in Western thought from being complete". (WM 395; TM 378) However the Church's affirmation that the Word is with God from all eternity and its repudiation of all forms of subordinationism placed the problem of language entirely in the inner world of thought, Gadamer says, and tended to devalue the external, spoken word. (WM 397; TM 380) Thus the gains (from Gadamer's point of view) brought by the idea of Incarnation are mostly lost. However Gadamer does see some hopeful signs in Thomas Aquinas' discussion of language. His discussion of Thomas is based mainly on Comm. in Joh. cap. 1 ("De differentia verbi divini et humani") and on "the difficult and substantial opusculum, compiled from genuine texts by Thomas, called 'De natura verbi intellectus' ". (WM 399 note 1; TM 529 note 42) As we have said, it is beyond the present writer's scope and competence to give an account of Gadamer's

discussion here. What seems to be the most important result of this discussion is Gadamer's view that while Thomas stresses the differences between the divine Word and the human word, and sees the natural concept formation /Begriffsbildung/ of human language as imperfect and inferior to the logical order of essence /Wesensordnung/ with its concepts of substance and accident, nevertheless he recognized peculiar advantage in this imperfection - "the freedom to form an infinite number of concepts and to penetrate more and more into what is meant". (WM 404f; TM 387)

Gadamer seizes upon this recognition of a positive significance in finite human language and concept formation which he claims to find in Thomas, and in the third part of the section("Language and Concept Formation") he discusses this "constant process of concept formation by means of which the life of a language develops". (WM 405; TM 388) This natural concept formation depends on the metaphorical use of language, and it is only because of the prejudice of a logical theory which is alien to language that the metaphorical use of language is devalued. (WM 406; TM 389) Gadamer claims that "classificatory logic starts from the logical work that language has done for it in advance", and that this is confirmed by an examination of its prehistory, especially in the Platonic Academy. (ibid.) There follows another historical excursion, the result of which seems to be that "the Aristotelian critique has robbed the logical achievement of language of its scientific justification. It is recognized only from the point of view of rhetoric and is understood there as the artistic device of the metaphor". (WM 409; TM 391) The achievement of language begins to be recognized by mediaeval thought, but it was only

when the scholastic combination of Christian thought with Aristotelian philosophy was supplemented by a new element that the problem of language could come into its own and the difference between divine and human thought could be viewed positively, Gadamer tells us. This new element was the idea that human thought is, by analogy with divine thought, creative. (WM 411; TM 393) The emergence of this new element is connected with the rise of nominalism, and Gadamer turns his attention to Nicholas of Cusa whose theory of knowledge combines Platonic and nominalist elements. (WM 413; TM 396) Nicholas was able to recognize the significance of the variety of the vernacular languages which began to assume importance in the Renaissance. (ibid.) We cannot follow Gadamer in his discussion of Nicholas. What interests Gadamer above all in Nicholas is the idea that the variety of words in different languages for the same thing are not merely variations of expression, but are "variations of the view of the thing and of the concept formation which follows it; that is, there is an essential inexactness which does not exclude there nevertheless being in all the variations a reflection of the thing itself (of the forma). This kind of essential inexactness can be overcome only if the mind rises to the infinite". (WM 414; TM 396) In the following section Gadamer will move on to the modern period and, after a discussion of Humboldt, will begin his own presentation of language. Precisely how this presentation relates to his understanding of Nicholas is not clear. Gadamer obviously feels a strong affinity with Nicholas, but his discussion of him (and the section as a whole) ends on an ambiguous and perhaps rather coy note: "Despite all the differences /between the various languages/ agreement is still preserved

and this is what the Christian Platonist is concerned with. What is essential for him is the relation to the thing /der Sachbezug/ in all human language and not so much the linguisticality /die Sprachgebundenheit/ of human knowledge of things. The latter represents only a prismatic refraction in which there shines the one truth". (WM 414f; TM 397)

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